

Talking Archives:
Voice-Over in Archival Film Practices

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ABSTRACT

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Voice-over narration remains an overlooked element in the study of archival film practices. Theorists and filmmakers have explored the ways in which voice-over can be employed in documentary and fiction filmmaking, and in the essay film, but there has been little attention to its role in archival film practices. Some of the permutations of voice-over include the use of several pieces of narration from different sources; disembodied narrator; subjective commentary; unreliable narrator; self-reflexive narration, and no voice-over at all. Formal experimentation with voice-over in archival films has allowed filmmakers to introduce their often fragmentary audio-visual materials into new contexts and to establish novel forms of continuity. With equal focus on the aesthetic qualities of voice-over narration and its role in relation to narrative, this thesis examines the use of voice-over in the archival films of Peter Greenaway and Craig Baldwin. Through a close textual analysis of their films, this thesis aims to demonstrate the potential of voice-over narration in shaping the viewer's perception of the archive. It is argued that through an emphasis on the discontinuous nature of archival documents in their films (on thematic as well as formal levels) they construct partially-developed narratives, which serve different ends in each film. It is shown that whereas Greenaway's use of voice-over narration points to the subjectivity of the act of accessing and experiencing the archive, narration in Baldwin's cinema primarily draws attention to socio-political circumstances in which certain audio-visual "documents" have been produced. Interrogating the role of voice-over narration in archival film practices, this thesis concludes with the possibilities for further experimentation and theorization in this field.

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INTRODUCTION

Most studies of non-fiction films focus on the image only, or comment on the overall effect of sound on the viewer's reading of the image, without paying attention to specific aesthetic qualities of voice-over narration. Historically, there have been a wide range of uses of this cinematic device in non-fiction film: from the disembodied narrator in the Griersonian documentary (conventionally viewed as an authority of knowledge outside the film's diegetic world) to the subjective commentary of a supposedly unknown filmmaker in Chris Marker's essay film, *Sans Soleil* (1983). Voice-over narration in archival film practices has been employed in a number of different ways: from lack of any narration in *Lyrisch Nitraat* (Peter Delpeut, 1991) to the use of many fragments of narration whose sources are unknown in *Very Nice, Very Nice* (Arthur Lipsett, 1961). With a focus on the use of voice-over narration in archival film practices, this thesis examines the possibilities offered by this device in shaping the viewer's experience of "archival documents" on the visual track. This will be done through the discussion of formal qualities of voice-over narration (such as tone and synchronization) and the text of the narration in the archival films of Peter Greenaway and Craig Baldwin. In each of their films, voice-over narration is utilized to build a fictional universe in which disparate audio-visual fragments are linked together. Before moving forward with the discussion of the necessity of the study of voice-over narration in archival films, it must be explained why in this thesis the term "archival film" will be used instead of, for example, found footage film or compilation film.

In the Foreword to one of the earliest books written on "compilation films," *Films Beget Films: A Study of the Compilation Film* (1964), Jay Leyda writes that in the 1960s there was no name for films that were made with already existing footage that "originated at some time in the

past, [and were not] mere records or documents" (9). Fifty years ago, Leyda chose the term "compilation film" for works that were made "to reconstruct the past, or even to comment on it with the help of newsreel archives" (10). With the expansion of such filmmaking practices, and availability of various forms of material from the past (e.g. educational films, behind the scene footage, and digital archives), Leyda's description of such filmmaking methods sounds outdated. A more recent attempt to classify films that use such materials is the three categories suggested by William Wees in his book, *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* (1993). Wees classifies "found footage" films into: (i) "compilation films" such as Emile de Antonio's *Point of Order* (1964) that intend to provide their audience with broader understanding of old footage, and are often accompanied by voice-over or text that make connections between the compilation filmmaker's concept and the old footage: "[compilation films] do not challenge the representational nature of the images themselves," nor do they make their viewers "more alert to montage as a method of composition" (36); (ii) "collage films" which criticize the representational qualities of the old footage that may have been "originally intended to be seen as unmediated signifiers of reality" (40); and, (iii) "appropriation films" which, similar to collage films, do not respect traditional montage methods. For example, an appropriation film such as Michael Jackson's music video *Man In The Mirror* (1987) may show a rapid sequence of unrelated images. However, Wees argues, unlike collage films, appropriation films do not offer a critical point of view. Although Wees's categories help identify various potentials and uses of found material throughout the history of cinema, he fails to elaborate on the use of unidentified, unofficial, fake or manipulated archives in his book.

In his essay "Found Footage Film as Discursive Metahistory: Craig Baldwin's *Tribulation 99*," Michael Zryd asserts that whereas the archive is "an official institution that

separates historical record from the outtake," found footage could be from "private collections, commercial stock shot agencies, junk stores, and garbage bins" where it is possible to actually "find" treasures between "waste [and] junk" (41). One of the main problems with Zryd's separation between found and archival is that, in the age of digital archives, the archive is no longer necessarily a gated "institution" where knowledge is classified outside history. Today, digital search technologies and data banks have diversified modes of collecting and archiving, and, thus, have turned archiving into an everyday practice. For instance, Dominic Gagnon's *Hoax_canular* (2013) is completely made with footage uploaded on YouTube by teenagers who filmed themselves talking about the end of the world. Gagnon's film comments on filmmaking as an act of organizing the material already archived on a YouTube channel. Zryd's definition of found vs. archival footage is not applicable to such filmmaking practices which challenge the separation between "official historical records" and "junk".

There is no single term or categorization method that can be used for all films that use already existing materials. More importantly, what appears to be already existing may be footage that has been simulated to appear as found. Jaimie Baron suggests that instead of using the terms "found" and "archival," as necessarily opposites, one should "regard 'foundness' as a constituent element of all archival documents as they are perceived in appropriation films, whether they were 'found' in an archive or 'found' on the street" (17). For Baron, the experience of the archive is partly shaped by this "foundness" which adds a sense of "authenticity" to the archival document. As Baron rightly argues, ultimately it is up to the individual viewer to "experience" this "foundness" in a document that appears to be taken from another source. In this thesis, the term "archival film" refers to films that (i) extensively use audiovisual materials that appear to be from the past; however, in an archival film, it may or may not be clear that the material has been

recorded for the making of the film under discussion; and/or (ii) directly address the notion of the archive through, for instance, the examination of various methods of archiving, archives as institutions, fabrication and simulation of archival material, chaos and entropy within archives, and archiveology. Using the term "archival film" allows for a focus on a range of experiences of the archive that a given film may generate, rather than putting films in categories that, more often than not, are overlapping. Therefore, in this thesis, an "archival film" is one that appears to be using archival material or films in which the archive is one of the central thematic and formal preoccupations.

There is a lack of scholarship exploring and theorizing the use of voice-over (and sound in general) in archival films. With a focus on voice-over narration, this thesis is an intervention in the field of archival film practices that will contribute to the study of new documentary forms, sound theory, and the notion of the archive. The relationship between voice-over and image will be examined through two case studies: the archival films of Peter Greenaway and Craig Baldwin. There are many other filmmakers, such as Adam Curtis and John Akomfrah, who have frequently used voice-over narration in their archival films. However, what is unique about Greenaway's and Baldwin's films is their insistence on the use of voice-over as a major cinematic device to engage their audiences with the notion of the archive and to experiment with formal qualities of voice-over narration, such as multi-layered voice-over and asynchronism. Greenaway's films discussed in this thesis (from 1969 to 1980) mock the inherent absurdity of the act of archiving. On the other hand, Baldwin has sustained the experimental collage mode of archival film practice for some decades. Out of the eight films he has made to date, four of them will be examined here. Through the analysis of the evolution of voice-over techniques developed

in Greenaway's and Baldwin's films, this thesis sheds new light on the potential of voice-over in archival film practices.

* * *

Peter Greenaway

Throughout his filmmaking career, and particularly in the 1970s, Peter Greenaway has exhibited an interest in parodic use of voice-over narration to subvert the idea of there being a documentary truth. In the 1960s, Greenaway worked as a documentary editor at the Central Office of Information (literally a British propaganda institution), a work experience which is an essential factor in Greenaway's growing interest in the 1970s for parodying documentary conventions. In addition to an interest in the use of voice-over and an engagement with the notion of documentary truth, his short films made prior to 1980 share a number of other thematic and formal concerns, such as references to systems of organization, death, language, home movies, and landscape. These recurring formal and thematic concerns are present in his first feature film, *The Falls* (1980), which is often considered as a transition point in Greenaway's cinematic career. Although, as will be discussed in this thesis, his works up to *The Falls* can hardly be labeled as "documentary", starting from *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982) Greenaway moved to the world of fiction filmmaking. However, even in his post-*Falls* period he has been rigorously engaged with many of his earlier concerns. For example landscape and the notion of documentation are among the major themes of *The Draughtsman's Contract*. Sarah Street rightly argues that Greenaway's short and feature films alike "display a similar preoccupation with categorisation; complex narratives; unusual juxtapositions of sound and

image; landscape; [and] an abundance of intertextual references" (219). Thus, instead of dividing the filmmaker's oeuvre into two disparate phases, it is important to pay attention to such continuities in his work. Nonetheless, it can be argued that it is in the first phase of his work that voice-over narration is persistently used as a subversive tool; a strategy that most overtly shapes the audience's experience of the "many truths" in *The Falls*.

Greenaway's pre-*Falls* films have been associated with the works of structural filmmakers such as Michael Snow; however, unlike Snow, Greenaway has almost always been interested in narrative. Greenaway, in his early works, uses voice-over narration with actual and simulated archival materials, texts and drawings in order to multiply the sources of information in his stories, and thus create a sense of unreliability and doubt aroused by contradictory and unrelated information. By focusing on the use of voice-over narration in Greenaway's work up until 1980, this thesis examines the potential of a device used to mock the authority of the omniscient narrator (as the voice of truth). Greenaway's parodic use of voice-over (both formal experiments and the text of the narration) undermines the reliability of archival material as records of the past. Through their use of voice-over narration, his films parody the conventions of the documentary form and pose questions regarding our understanding of the archive as a collection and a method of organization, an institution, and a way of remembering.

Craig Baldwin

Craig Baldwin, the second filmmaker whose work will be studied in this thesis, has used a wide variety of archival materials in his films. He appropriates fiction and documentary footage alike, such as shots from B-movies and newsreel footage. The diversity of archival materials used in Baldwin's cinema complicates the viewer's reading of the stories of the past

told in his films. A key technique that shapes the viewer's experience of the archival material is Baldwin's frequent use of voice-over, which often contributes to the development of the narrative. He has employed voice-over narration to recontextualize archival material and create new historical narratives in his films. Furthermore, in his more recent films, he has moved to a mode of filmmaking that he himself calls "compilation narrative", that is a type of storytelling which uses archival sounds and images together with live-action footage and original voice-over. This thesis will explore the use of voice-over narration in relation to the method of collage that Baldwin employs to construct his own narratives in his archival films. These films demonstrate an extensive use of voice-over as a primary tool to introduce archival images and sounds into new contexts. Moreover, in each film, Baldwin builds on his experiments with voice-over in his earlier films and creates multiple new ways in which voice-over is employed to drive the narrative forward. Hence, in order to fully grasp the crucial role of voice-over in Baldwin's cinema, it is necessary to trace the evolution of voice-over techniques and materials in his works over the past few decades.

Voices used in Baldwin's films may be those of a narrator, the filmmaker himself, archival sound (without the original footage), a character in archival footage, or an actor in Baldwin's film (live-action). The constant shifting between these voices and simultaneous use of several voices (multi-layered voice-over) may make the voice-over rather confusing for the audience. For instance, the filmmaker's narration may be suddenly interrupted or accompanied by the voice of a character in a B-Movie followed by the voice of a news anchor whose image is not shown. Such constant changes between various voices from different sources may make the viewer wonder which one of the voices, if any, is to be trusted. For example, in *Spectres of the Spectrum*, we hear the voice-over of fictional characters (live-action actors) explaining the

history of broadcasting monopolies; one may question the authenticity of the information given by the voice-over narrator since, unlike experts in more conventional documentaries, the experts in this film are fictional characters. In this example, the relation between various sounds and archival images is further complicated when the fictional characters' voice-over is interrupted by both the original voice-over of the archival material on screen and other voices whose sources are unknown. The multi-layered and multi-voiced narration in Baldwin's cinema undermines the reliability of individual narrators and creates a space where the audience is invited to actively piece the parts together.

Although Baldwin's use of various sources of sound and voice-over is a prominent characteristic of his films, there are other techniques which he employs to extend the possibilities of voice-over narration in archival filmmaking. For example, he experiments with the manner of telling (tone of speech), ironic voice-over narration, the relation between voice-over and story events, single vs. multiple narrators, and asynchronous voices for actors. These techniques provide new ways of thinking about the production and consumption of the archival material that constitute the larger part of his films. Furthermore, his various methods of using voice-over foreground the temporal gap between the original archival material and its appropriation in the new context, and, thus, influences the audience's experience of the archival material. The wide range of voice-over materials and techniques found in Baldwin's cinema and his insistence on the use of voice-over throughout his filmmaking career make him an exemplary candidate for the study of voice-over in archival film practices.

* * *

A major part of this thesis will consist of textual analysis of the selected films. To do so, it is necessary to break down the films into component parts, transcribe the voice-over, and examine the variety of ways in which voice-over narration has been used in relation to the image. One of the challenges associated with close analysis of archival film practices is that in some cases it may not be obvious whether certain sounds and images are "found" material or if they have been made by the filmmaker for that particular film. In these cases, my approach is that it is less important to know the "origin" of the material than to reflect on how this ambiguity (which is often made intentionally) contributes to the viewer's experience of the archive. For instance, this uncertainty may affect the audience's perception of the temporal disparity between the "past" of the original footage, the "past" of the new context (film), and the "now" of the viewing moment.

Since my object of study is the use of voice-over in Greenaway's and Baldwin's archival films, it is essential to review the scholarship on the use of voice-over in cinema (particularly the avant-garde and documentary film) and the various ways in which filmmakers have employed this device in relation to the image. As early as the late 1920s, Soviet theorists and filmmakers were reflecting on the expressive potential of sound in cinema. In their 1928 manifesto, "A Statement", Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Grigori Alexandrov wrote that the first uses of sound in cinema would be for "commercial exploitation of the most salable merchandise, TALKING FILMS" (84). The naturalistic use of sound in the talkies, they wrote, corresponds with the action on the screen, thus "providing a certain 'illusion' of talking people, of audible objects, etc." (84). In relation to their theories of montage, they claimed,

To use sound in this way will destroy the culture of montage, for every

ADHESION of sound to a visual montage piece increases its inertia as a

montage piece, and increases the independence of its meaning-and this will undoubtedly be to the detriment of montage, operating in the first place not on the montage pieces but on their JUXTAPOSITION.

ONLY A CONTRAPUNTAL USE of sound in relation to the visual montage piece will afford a new potentiality of montage development and perfection.(84)

In this manifesto, there is a particular emphasis on the need for experimentation with non-synchronization between sound and image, which will "lead to the creation of an ORCHESTRAL COUNTERPOINT of visual and aural images" (84).

Another early theoretical contribution to alternative uses of sound in cinema is Pudovkin's 1929 essay, "Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film," where he writes: "It would be entirely false to consider sound merely as a mechanical device enabling us to enhance the naturalness of the image. [One of the functions of sound] is to augment the potential expressiveness of the film's content" (86). Although in this essay Pudovkin is not writing directly about non-fiction cinema, the principal thesis of his essay could be applied to both non-fiction and fiction films. He believes that sound's potential is beyond straightforward synchronized dialogue, and advocates for "the development of the image and the sound strip each along a separate rhythmic course" (86). For Pudovkin, the arrangement of asynchronous sounds may achieve a rhythm that is closer to our perception of the world (instead of using synchronous sound to simply copy the rhythm of the objective world). Referring to such early Soviet writings on the "contrapuntal" use of sound in relation to the image, Stella Bruzzi argues that these theories provide us with an "alternative narration tradition" in the documentary form which raises

the question why so often "voice-over is perceived as a threat, as didactic and anti-democratic?"(48).

Many scholars, such as Sarah Kozloff, Charles Wolfe, Stella Bruzzi, and Laura Rascaroli have examined the role of voice-over narration in cinema. In her essay, "The Prejudices Against Voice-Over Narration," Sarah Kozloff rejects the theories of, among others, Bela Balazs and Rudolf Arnheim, who believed in the hierarchical primacy of image over sound in cinema. Kozloff argues that such criticisms are invalid in that the verbal description of an object and the image of that object do not necessarily provide the same information since there are different signs involved in verbal and visual communications. In her essay, "Irony in Voice-Over Films," Kozloff examines the relationship of voice-over to irony in cinema, arguing that "voice-over narration extends film's ironic capabilities" (109). She writes that unlike the interplay between story events and the narrator's comments in literature, voice-over narration in cinema is experienced by the viewer who is simultaneously watching the image. For Kozloff, adding voice-over narration to a film results in the "doubling of the source of the narrative, an image-maker and an imitation storyteller;" a doubling which the filmmaker can exploit to create an ironic detachment between the two sources (110).

Another example of the debates surrounding the use of voice-over in cinema is Charles Wolfe's essay, "Historicising the 'Voice of God': The Place of Vocal Narration in Classical Documentary," in which he writes that voice-over narration in the classical documentary of the 1930s and 1940s has often been described as a voice that represents a position of knowledge outside the spatial and temporal world of the film. Particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, the critics and filmmakers associated with Direct Cinema and Cinéma Vérité criticized the use of voice-over in early documentaries as an authoritarian technique. In his close analysis of documentaries

such as *The Spanish Earth* (Joris Ivens, 1937), Wolfe argues that we need to question the conventional histories of the documentary form, especially the prejudices against the use of voice-over in documentaries.

Other studies have explored alternative ways of using voice-over in documentary cinema, and have rejected generalizations about the characteristics of different documentary modes. In her book, *New Documentary*, Stella Bruzzi argues that oversimplification of documentary voice-over in the works of scholars such as Bill Nichols results in the rejection of this cinematic device as being "the filmmakers' ultimate tool for telling people what to think" (50). According to Bruzzi, "[t]his gross oversimplification covers a multitude of differences, from the most common use of commentary as an economic device able to efficiently relay information that might otherwise not be available or might take too long to tell in images, to its deployment as an ironic and polemical tool" (50). She rejects such false assumptions, and supports her argument through her discussion of the use of voice-over in several films, such as Chris Marker's essay film *Sans Soleil*, in which the voice-over narration creates a sense of detachment between sound and image. The voice-over narration in this film complicates the status of the footage; has the footage been shot by "he" to whom the female narrator refers throughout the film? Has it been found in an official archive? Is the viewer watching the film that 'he' said he would make one day?

Another important contribution to this field of inquiry is Laura Rascaroli's book, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film*, where she argues that "to reduce all nonfictional voice-overs to an imperialist, patriarchal and authoritative voice-of-God is controversial as well as counterproductive" (2009, 44). She calls for paying a particular attention to the aesthetic values of voice-over narration in each particular text, rather than assuming that all voice-over commentaries serve the same function in relation to the image. For instance, the

tone of voice-over should be taken into consideration; in other words, we should think about how the voice actually says what it says (Rascaroli 2009, 49).

A closer look at the history of non-fiction film proves that voice-over narration (even in the 1930s) cannot be reduced to the Voice-of-God type only. In his essay "Of the History of the Essay Film: From Vertov to Varda," Timothy Corrigan provides several examples from the early 1930s that confirm that from the early years of sound in the cinema filmmakers have used voice-over in many different ways, such as "lyrical, ironic, or polemical commentary" (2011, 56). According to Corrigan, voice-over even in the 1930s encouraged "a dramatic engagement with documentary facts rather than a description of those facts" (2011, 56). Therefore, it is inaccurate to claim that early voice-over narrators only described the imagery, and it was only later in the history of cinema that filmmakers realized voice-over narration's alternative potentials.

An example of early experiments with voice-over in cinema is the detached and exaggerated French narration in *Las Hurdes* (Louis Bunuel, 1932). Voice-over narration of the male narrator in this film may sound authoritative and reliable at first as the narrator often explains what is shown. For example, when the narrator explains that the main sources of food in the village are potatoes and beans, there is a shot of a woman peeling a potato. However, as the film continues there is an increasing sense of unreliability in the narration, the climax of which is the infamous surrealist scene of a donkey attacked by bees. In this scene, the narrator explains that the donkey was carrying some bee hives. While the animal was tied up, one of the hives had fallen and bees had killed the donkey in an hour. The narrator continues to say that a month before the arrival of the film crew, three men and eleven donkeys had died the same way. It is not only the improbability of the accident occurring at such frequency that makes the narration absurdly "unbelievable"; throughout the film, the narrator repeatedly provides such precise

statistics with no evidence. In his interrogation of the possibility of documentary truth in this film, Bunuel employs a voice-over narration that is at times descriptive, patronizing, absurd, or even sarcastic. Catherine Russell argues that *Las Hurdes* "constitutes a remarkable parody of the voice-over documentary that did not yet exist" (102, 2006). According to Russell, "the film could not have been made much later than 1932, after which the Griersonian voice-over became institutionalized as the preeminent documentary form" (102, 2006). There are numerous studies of such non-conventional uses of voice-over in cinema and the ways in which they affect the viewer's experience of the visual track, some of which have been mentioned above. However, it is rarely the case that the relation between voice-over narration and the experience of the archive (in form of archival material or the archive as a theme) is closely examined. It is the aim of this thesis to engage with these issues in the archival films of Peter Greenaway and Craig Baldwin.

* * *

The first chapter of this thesis will be dedicated to the study of the use of voice-over in Peter Greenaway's films until 1980. This chapter is divided into two parts. First, I will investigate the evolution of the use of voice-over in Greenaway's short films made between 1969 and 1978, that is his early works before the release of *The Falls*. The films to be explored are: *Intervals* (1969); *H Is for House* (1973); *Windows* (1975); *Water Wickets* (1975); *Dear Phone* (1977); *A Walk Through H: The Reincarnation of an Ornithologist* (1978); and *Vertical Features Remake* (1978). Then, in the second part of this chapter, I will do a close analysis of his first feature film, *The Falls*. In *The Falls*, Greenaway makes numerous references to his earlier films making his own films into a kind of archival source. Furthermore, many of his recurring formal

and thematic concerns prior to the making of *The Falls* are present in this film. It is my goal in the second part of this chapter to study this three-hour long film in light of my discussion of his earlier works.

In chapter two, I will investigate the employment of voice-over narration in the mesmerizing web of sounds and images in Craig Baldwin's cinema. Four of his films will be studied in the four sections of this chapter: *Tribulation 99* (1991), *¡O No Coronado!* (1992), *Spectres of the Spectrum* (1999), and *Mock Up on Mu* (2008). Through a close textual analysis of these four films, I will illustrate the significance of this case study for a broader conceptualization of the use of voice-over as a tool to engage with the past in archival films. There will be a focus on the many techniques and sources of voice-over narration in Baldwin's cinema, and how such a diversity shapes the audience's experience of the archival fragments that constitute the films.

CHAPTER 1

C IS FOR CATEGORY: VOICE-OVER IN PETER GREENAWAY'S ARCHIVAL FILMS (1969-80)

[In] a certain Chinese encyclopaedia [...] it is written that animals are divided into (a) those that belong to the emperor; (b) embalmed ones; (c) those that are trained; (d) suckling pigs; (e) mermaids; (f) fabulous ones; (g) stray dogs; (h) those that are included in this classification; (i) those that tremble as if they were mad; (j) innumerable ones; (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's-hair brush; (l) etcetera; (m) those that have just broken the flower vase; (n) those that at a distance resemble flies. (Borges 231)

Greenaway's films display a fascination with mocking encyclopedic classification systems. He argues: "Works of art refer to great masses of culture, they are encyclopedic by nature. I want to make films that rationally represent all the world in one place. That mocks human effort because you cannot do that" (Pally 6). The presence of alphabetical lists of names, numbered maps and charts in his works serves the purpose of parodying official attempts to classify knowledge by "experts", such as scholars, documentarists and government officials. He often does so by foregrounding the absurdity of making alphabetical lists. Speaking about the presence of such lists in his film *H Is for House* (1973), Greenaway says:

If you think of the alphabetical index, it is a very primitive way of organizing information and in some way this is totally absurdist. Where ever else in any epistemological collection can you put Happiness, His holiness, Heaven, ..., all completely disparate ideas but all simply united by the initial? (The Early Films of Peter Greenaway 1)

Writing about Greenaway as a British filmmaker, Bill Grantham suggests that his films were influenced by "the short-lived 'absurdist' theatre of the 1950s and 1960s, in particular the work of N. F. Simpson [...] and the television and film work of Monty Python" (160). Although pointing to the inherent absurdity of organizational methods is a major reason why Greenaway has so vigorously referred to them in his cinema, his films take advantage of the encyclopedic in other ways, most importantly as a structuring method for the films. For example, one of his most celebrated films, *The Falls* (1980) consists of 92 sections each of which presents the biography of a character whose last name starts with the letters F, A, L, L. Therefore, the encyclopedic in Greenaway's films discussed in this thesis exists as a thematic concern as well as a structuring element.

Various scholars and critics have written on the relationship between narrative and the excess of words and ideas in Greenaway's films that are organized according to an internal logic but are otherwise unrelated (for example, words that start with the letter H). Sarah Street argues that Greenaway's early short films display a "preoccupation with categorisation; complex narratives; [and] unusual juxtapositions of sound and image" (218). According to Street, Greenaway's use of classification systems invites the viewer "to work at decoding unfamiliar associations in relation to the narratives and to intertextual overspill" (218). Paula Willoquet-Maricondi writes about the relationship between the multiplicity of the sources of information in Greenaway's short films and the narrative. She posits that, particularly in his short films, "an excess of narration [...] overload[s] the film and destabilize[s] meaning," as a result of which, "meaning is lost not because of a lack of story, but because there is too much story" (14). Street identifies a link between Greenaway's films and "the modernists of the Documentary Movement in his subversion of classic documentary traditions" (217). She argues that Greenaway's works

"question the notion of truth in the cinema and present the viewer with the pleasures and difficulties of the counter-cinematic possibilities offered by pluralist narratives" (217).

Greenaway asserts that: "I feel suspicious about narrative in the cinema and try either to subvert it or minimise it or to be extravagant about it in ways that draw attention to it" (Sampson 12). It is my goal in this chapter to discuss the subversive use of voice-over narration in telling "too much story" in Greenaway's films made between 1969 and 1980.

Of particular interest is the use of voice-over narration in telling stories backed up by both actual and simulated archival "documents". Stella Bruzzi argues that "the fundamental issue of documentary film is the way in which the viewer is invited to access the 'document' or 'record' through representation or interpretation, to the extent that a piece of archive material becomes a mutable rather than a fixed point of reference" (17). In Greenaway's films there is a curious relationship between the voice-over narration and other materials, such as archival images, texts, and interviews with "experts". The contradictory or completely unrelated information provided by each of these elements (including the bureaucratic-sounding voice-over narrator) makes the status of truth and the authenticity of the documents ambiguous. As mentioned in the Introduction, Greenaway's work as a documentary editor in the 1960s played an important role in the filmmaker's future practices in parodying some of the conventions of the documentary film, such as the notion of "documentary truth" (Lawrence 11). Writing about the unstable authority of truth in *The Falls*, P. Adams Sitney notes that Greenaway "puts into question the identities and claims of his characters and the authority of the narrative voice," thus, turning the films into vehicles for "arousing and compounding doubt" (46). Greenaway's use of voice-over narration, according to Street, underlines "the absurdity of much information-speak and the whole fallacy of there being a voice of truth" (217). Greenaway's background in "official" documentary cinema

and his extensive use of voice-over in telling stories based on archival documents makes it more than necessary to think about the representation of the archive as a means to construct the narrative in his fake-documentary films.

Greenaway often uses self-reflexive voice-over narration to address the constructedness of the archive and the narratives built upon archival documents. The self-reflexive voice-over narrators in his films "import arbitrary structures (alphabetical, numerical, [...] cartographical, correlative, or narrational)" that the filmmaker employs to shape "some actual or invented files, or archives, that become the object of his films' subversive scrutiny" (Testa 84). Greenaway's films throughout the 1970s display a growing interest in the use of self-reflexive voice-over narration as a tool to investigate the notion of collecting and organizing actual and simulated archival documents. His narrations not only mock certain filmmaking traditions such as the ethnographic film, but also point to the inherent errors in the content and methods of collection of any given archive.

The viewer's perception of time in Greenaway's films is often manipulated by juxtaposing shots that appear to have been produced in different times, or are presented as such by voice-over narrators. Jaimie Baron posits that a main factor that makes one recognize footage as "archival" is "temporal disparity," which means "the perception by the viewer of an appropriation film of a 'then' and a 'now' generated within a single text" (18). According to Baron, "the archive effect" is produced if different shots within the same appropriation film are perceived as products from different time periods. She argues that temporal disparity may occur at two different levels: (i) the profilmic object: for example, two shots of the same street recorded in two different centuries; and (ii) the filmstrip or video file itself: for example, color or black and white, and the degree of decay of the footage. However, two apparently different documents may have been

recorded at the same time period; for instance, at first glance, black and white super-8 film and color HD recording of the same street appear to have been produced at different moments in time (since we associate grainy black and white footage with the past, and color HD with the present). Baron suggests that there is no archive effect generated in such cases because eventually the viewer understands that the older looking footage is not indeed from the "archival" past. What ultimately produces the archive effect and gives a sense of "authenticity" to a certain document is the individual viewer's recognition of the "gap" between the "then" of production of a document and the "now" of its appropriation in a film. However, filmmakers may intentionally "simulate" the footage to make it appear as a document from the past. For example, deteriorated black and white footage of a desert (presented as an "archival" document in a film) may actually be the result of a process to deliberately damage the filmstrip produced in 2016. Furthermore, in such simulations, voice-over narration may be employed to present the footage as a document from another time period, and, thus produce the archive effect. In such cases, it may not always be straightforward to identify the product as fake. The perception of temporal disparity and the archive effect may be stimulated by simulations, and this may occur by manipulated images as well as voice-over narration. In this chapter, I will present some examples of the ways in which Greenaway creates a "temporal tension" instead of generating "the archive effect". I argue that whereas temporal disparity is produced when one actually believes that various footage come from different time periods, what I call temporal tension is generated when multiple sources of information contradict each other regarding our perception of time.

In my examination of the use of voice-over in Greenaway's archival films, I will investigate how the following elements shape the viewer's experience of both found and simulated archival materials: (i) the multiplicity of narrational systems at work in each film: for

example, the content of voice-over narration in relation to the visual track (images of rural landscape, texts, charts, maps, etc.); (ii) the unreliability and lack of authority of voice-over narration: for example, doubt and disbelief in the archive as a result of the inconsistencies within the narration, or absurd and improbable stories; (iii) the use of self-reflexive voice-over narration; and (iv) Greenaway's filmmaking as a method of collecting and structuring the elements of the archive.

1.1. Before *The Falls*

1.1.1. *Intervals* (1969)

The particular attention to voice-over narration in Greenaway's archival cinema is evident in one of his earliest films, *Intervals*. Divided into three parts, *Intervals* shows almost the same street shots of Venice three times, each time using a different combination of voice-over and soundtrack with background street noise: first, with the sound of a metronome; then, the voice of a narrator going through the alphabet; and, finally, the voice of a narrator reading a list of words accompanied by Vivaldi's music. How does the voice of the narrator in the second and third sections of the film alter the way the documentary footage is perceived by the viewer? To answer this question, it is helpful to think about the notion of the archive and the role of voice-over in shaping the viewer's experience of the film.

As mentioned in the first part of this chapter, in the 1960s and 1970s Greenaway playfully portrays the absurdity and arbitrary nature of various systems of categorization and archiving, such as databases and encyclopaedias. Whereas the sound of the metronome in the first section of *Intervals* reminds the viewer of the editing (tempo, to use a musical term associated with the metronome) and the constructedness of the film, the letters of the alphabet

read by the narrator in the second part of the film are a direct reference to alphabetically ordered sources of knowledge, such as dictionaries and encyclopaedias. It is no accident, then, that in the third part of the film we hear various words that seem to have been chosen arbitrarily, with no obvious relation to one another. The co-existence of unrelated elements in the film (e.g. shots of the streets, and narrations whose sources are unknown) displays the chaos and randomness within the archive, where everything and anything can be included.

In *Intervals*, the interrogation of the archive manifests itself in several other ways which will appear over and over in Greenaway's films in the 1970s. Some of these archival issues are private vs. public archives, and the authorship and collection of archival documents. In *Intervals*, there is no indication of who has shot the black and white footage of the streets; has the filmmaker found this footage in an archive, or has he himself documented fragments of daily life on the streets of an Italian city? According to Lev Manovich, the very act of editing shots together is a method of collecting material and organizing them in a unique way, which is the finished edited film. In *The Language of New Media*, Manovich writes that, "[w]e can think of all the material accumulated during shooting forming a database" (208). It is in the editing room that "the editor constructs a film narrative out of this database, creating a unique trajectory through the conceptual space of all possible films which could have been constructed" (Manovich 208). It is in this sense that *Intervals* can be considered a particular way of ordering some of the material that the filmmaker has found or filmed; in either case, the shots have been selected by the filmmaker from among many other shots in an archive which might have been privately constructed by an individual, such as Greenaway, or found by him in an already existing public archive, such as a government institution.

Similarly, regarding the selection of various fragments of sound and narration in the film, it can be said that they have been selected from a large number of pieces that existed in public or private archives or were taken from the filmmaker's private archive. Interestingly, in the second and third parts of the film, the voice of the narrator resembles that of a commercial recording done for an Italian language course. However, it is not clear whether it is a found-sound voice-over or narration recorded by the filmmaker. Hence, similar to the ambiguous status of the actual maker of the visual track, the absent body of the voice-over narrator makes one question the ownership of the voice.

1.1.2. *H Is for House* (1973, re-edited in 1978)

A home movie set in the rural English countryside, *H is for House* starts with a voice-over narrator telling a story about a naturalist. While the audience listens to the story, on the visual track various shots of a countryside house and apple trees are shown. A long shot of the house remains on the screen for about nine seconds just before the opening title. The voice-over narration over this image is composed of two parts: (i) the last line of the story about the naturalist; and, (ii) an adult saying "H is for", and a child answering "House". Right after this shot the title appears, and on the soundtrack a few seconds of classical music can be heard. The music is suddenly interrupted by the narrator's voice that reads off a list of words starting with the letter H that have no direct relation to the image on the screen (a long shot of a young girl). Thus, in the first minute of this short film Greenaway showcases a particular use of voice-over that will be employed persistently in his future films: a voice-over narrator telling stories or listing words with no explicit link with the images.

As the title of the film suggests, the filmmaker's preoccupation with the alphabet is evident in this film. Greenaway states that:

[m]y children were learning how to speak, were learning the alphabet. [The film is] based on the idea of collecting all in one place, all the words that you could think of that begin with the letter H. [...] If you think of the alphabetical index, it is a very primitive way of organizing information and in some way this is totally absurdist. [...] I wanted to play with this absurdity (The Early Films 1).

In the beginning of the film some of the lists follow an internal logic (e.g. different parts of the body starting with the letter H), but as the voice-over narrator continues to group other words starting with H, it becomes clear that the words have been chosen randomly. The list is open to all words starting with H, no matter what images are on the screen or what stories are being told by the narrators: "H is for bean - haricot bean. And has-been." In *H is for House* the voice-over narration lists all these disparate stories and words beside one another in a rather arbitrary and absurd manner. The randomness of the lists are even more pronounced when we think of the relation between the voice-over narration and the visual track. Although in some cases throughout the film what the narrator says can be seen on the screen (e.g. we hear "C is for Cat" and see the image of a cat), often the relationship between the voice-over narration and the images is unclear.

Another question raised by *H Is for House* is the relation between various sources of information provided by the narrators. Manovich writes that Greenaway, throughout his career, "has been working on a problem of how to reconcile database and narrative forms" (208). Some of what we hear in *H is for House* comes directly from dictionaries (a form of database); for

instance, there are several lists of words that have been grouped together for no obvious reason. However, there are other forms of information in the film, such as the various stories told by the voice-over narrators that are often banal or make no sense whatsoever; for example, towards the end, a story about a woman is told: a person "who lived in the country, watched and waited for the approach of the city. She was convinced it would come directly from the North, and only in the afternoon." Through the random collage of lists and stories delivered by the authoritative voice of the narrators over the images of a home movie, the filmmaker creates multiple narrative lines that lead the viewer nowhere near a unified whole. In other words, whereas the images hold together as one film (various shots of a family living in the countryside), the voice-over narration only provides fragments of several unrelated stories (elements of a database) that do not construct a single narrative.

1.1.3. *Windows* (1975)

Narrated by Greenaway himself, *Windows* is a short film shot at the same location as *H is for House*. While on the visual track images of picturesque countryside are shown through the windows of the house, the voice-over narration provides detailed statistics on people known to have fallen out of windows. *Windows* exhibits an overt fascination with numbers, orders, and modes of categorization. For example, the film starts with the narrator saying:

In 1973 in the parish of W, 37 people were killed as a result of falling out of windows. Of the 37 people who fell, 7 were children under 11, 11 were adolescents under 18 and the remaining adults were all under 71 save for a man believed by some to be 103.

For the rest of the film, voice-over narration classifies these deaths in different ways; for instance, "of the 18 men, 2 jumped deliberately, 4 were pushed, 5 were cases of misadventure and one, under the influence of an unknown drug, thought he could fly." One of the major recurring uses of voice-over narration in Greenaway's cinema is the provision of detailed information that does not serve any particular purpose in terms of its connection to other narrational systems in the film.

Although occasionally connections can be made between narration and the image on the screen or the soundtrack (e.g. we hear the harpsichord on the soundtrack when the narrator mentions the word Harpsichord), often there is no clear link between them; the only connection is that for the most part there are shots of windows and the narrator is giving the viewer information about people who have fallen out of windows. Like *H is for House*, there is a home movie quality to *Windows* such as shots of members of a family going about their daily activities in the rural landscape. However, Greenaway's use of voice-over in *Windows* creates tension between the death reports (the audio track) and the green countryside shots. Furthermore, the very fact that the detailed statistics are continually narrated throughout the film makes the deaths of the individuals rather insignificant. If the reason for collecting and charting the information on the deaths of individuals is to remember them, then the repetitive and monotonous nature of the voice-over narrator telling improbable stories over the unrelated visual track utterly betrays that goal.

However, such paradoxes between voice-over narration and the image in this particular film can be interpreted differently if the viewer is aware of paratexts (material outside the text of the film) such as Greenaway's interviews or website. Greenaway's statement on his website regarding the reasons behind the making of *Windows* reads: "I had been appalled and fascinated

by the statistics coming out of South Africa - political prisoners pushed out of windows, with fatuous excuses like they slipped on a bar of soap, they thought it was the door, etc." Having this information, the fictive documents (statistics) may be experienced as a commentary on the "accidental" deaths of the prisoners. In the same sense, the authoritative tone that the narrator uses to tell improbable stories may point to the ridiculousness of South African officials' explanations for the falls of the political prisoners. Therefore, the viewer's experience of voice-over narration is shaped not only by its specific qualities (the tone in this example) but also by extra textual information that some viewers may have prior to watching the film.

1.1.4. *Water Wickets* (1975)

The narrator in *Water Wickets* tells a tale about a fictional group of people, while successive shots of streams and ponds are shown and fragments of howl-like sounds create a sense of an ancient form of life in the wilderness. The convincing, educative tone of the voice-over narration gives the impression of the film being an ethnographic study of a tribe, and its habitat, language and wars. However, it does not take long before the viewer recognizes that the film is a parody of such ethnographic films. For instance, the narrator uses past tense to tell us about the events that occurred around the year 12478 (in the future). Moreover, most of the stories told in the film are clearly fantastical. For instance, the main character of the story, Agateer, decides to make a dam on a river in order to create nine lakes, one of which is called the Palace Lake; we are told that "the water in this lake was deliberately stained black, from the juice of the plant known as Agateer's Nightshade." The authoritative tone of voice-over narration adopted to deliver such satirical stories makes *Water Wickets* an early attempt by Greenaway to expand the critical possibilities of voice-over narration. Greenaway himself labels the film as a

"spoof piece of anthropology" (The Early Films 1) in which both tone and content of the voice-over narration are used in a subversive manner.

The voice-over narration in *Water Wrackets* uses the past tense in telling a story about the future creating what I call "temporal tension" in the experience of listening to the narrator. The temporal tension in this film is further complicated when we think of the relation between the illogicality of the notion of time in the voice-over narration and our experience of the images on the screen. Whereas in a mainstream archival documentary film the images are believed to be of the past, and thus contain truth value as historical documents, in *Water Wrackets* there is no indication as to when, where, and by whom the images have been filmed. Had the past tense been used in voice-over narration (without references to future), then the shots of ponds and streams in the film would have been more believable as the "actual" sites of Agateer's lakes. However, because of references to the year 12478 and the fact that it is impossible to see images of the future, the shots of the sites lack any evidentiary value in this film. By using voice-over narration in this way in *Water Wrackets*, the filmmaker points to the flaws of the often taken-for-granted relationship between the pastness of a document and its truthfulness. In a more self-reflexive gesture, Greenaway's next film builds on the relationship between archival documents and voice-over narration.

1.1.5. *Dear Phone* (1977)

Dear Phone is a mock-documentary about the uses of the telephone by several characters. Similar to Greenaway's earlier films, the tone of voice-over narration is authoritative and the narrator tells some improbable stories that undermine his own authority as a documentary voice-over narrator. For example, the narrator tells the audience about a person arrested for forgery,

who "was not jailed outright because his financial contribution to the state, through his use of the telephone, was immense." Another example is the story of a student of hygiene:

He believed the use of the public telephone, being in such intimate contact with the mouth, spreads infection, and he conducted a private campaign. Equipped with disinfectant, he spent his evenings in telephone booths scrubbing the mouthpiece of every telephone he could find. [...] He was eventually arrested for causing erosive burning to the face of a 43 year old public health inspector.

Such absurd stories that are told throughout the film mock the serious effort of the voice-over narrator. Moreover, the authenticity of the narrator's accounts is undermined because of the impossibility of making a singular, definite story as the film progresses. By the end of the film, it becomes obvious that the authority of knowledge (the narrator) has failed to provide a final and complete version of the story.

For the most part of *Dear Phone* the voice-over narrator reads from almost illegible handwritten texts scrawled on the backs of envelopes, but towards the end of the film the texts are typewritten, and, therefore, can be easily read (Fig. 1.1).

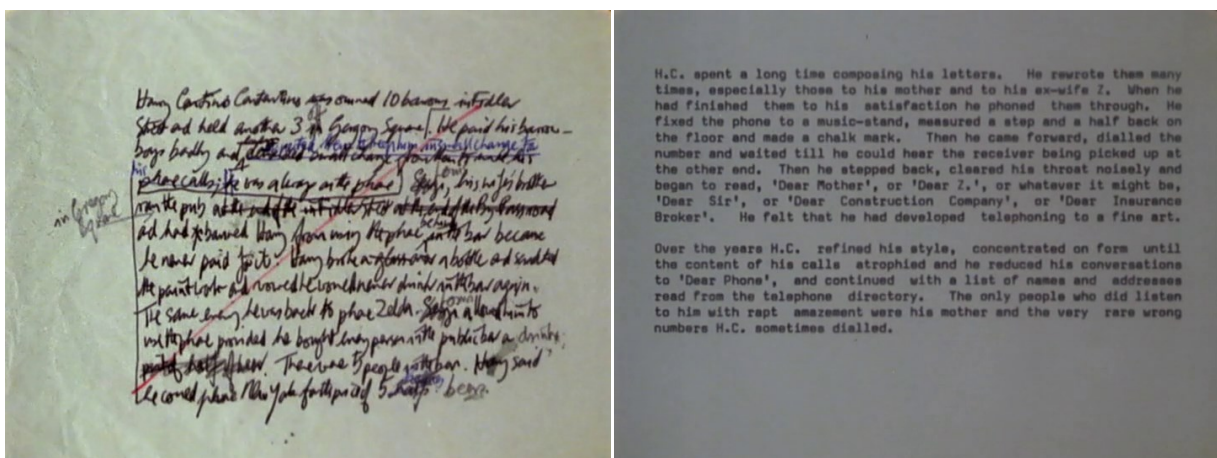


Fig. 1.1: The documents in *Dear Phone* (Peter Greenaway, 1977): at the beginning (left) and towards the end of the film (right)

One may ask whether in this film the voice-over narration makes the handwritten documents accessible? If that is the case in *Dear Phone*, what is the relationship between the images of texts often made "readable" through voice-over narration, and the other visuals, such as recurring shots of red telephone booths? The telephone that typically signifies communication and comfort is a site of doubt in *Dear Phone*. In this sense, Greenaway's ironic use of an illegible text as an image juxtaposed with other images such as red phone booths brings attention to the difficulties faced in the act of interpreting any documents; it is the task of the "reader" to collect and reorganize disparate ideas that are found side by side. Explaining the way children's books used to be made, Greenaway mentions that in the past there was a lack of synchronization between illustrations and the text; so children needed to make their own associations between the texts and the images that came in different parts of the book (because of the particular method of binding books in the past) (The Early Films 1). He mentions that this was used as a way of making *Dear Phone*: "We give you a text and then give you a disassociated image of a telephone booth, then go back to the text again. So a little puzzle is always in motion to find which telephone box is related to which particular story" (The Early Films 1).

It is with *Dear Phone* that self-reflexive voice-over narrations starts to play a crucial role in Greenaway's cinema. For example, the last text read by the narrator in this film is clearly self-reflexive; part of the text reads:

H.C. spent a long time composing his letters. He rewrote them many times [...]

Over the years, H.C. refined his style, concentrated on form until the content of his calls atrophied and he reduced his conversations to 'Dear Phone' and continued with a list of names and addresses read from the telephone directory.

In this excerpt, other than the references to the medium of cinema and the process of making this film (e.g. rewriting the narration over and over), Greenaway points to his persistent parody of dictionaries, lists, databases, and other systems of classification and representation of knowledge. However, more importantly, the use of self-reflexive voice-over narration brings to mind a key question regarding the production of the texts presented in the film as documents that are used to "narrate" the stories of the characters (however fragmented and unbelievable the stories might be). All the texts in the film, except the very last one, have been edited multiple times, some words have been crossed out and some sentences have been rephrased. As the voice-over narration quoted above suggests, it seems like the filmmaker has archived the process of creation and correction of the texts that perhaps have been written by H.C. (the filmmaker himself). Thus, by making this film Greenaway archives the process of rewriting the film's narration and makes public his "privately" made archive.

1.1.6. *A Walk Through H: The Reincarnation of an Ornithologist* (1978)

Greenaway's next film employs documents (maps) to take the viewer on a journey. *A Walk Through H: The Reincarnation of an Ornithologist* starts with a tracking-in shot in which the camera moves between various rooms in an art gallery where a number of drawings are exhibited. At the same time, the first-person anonymous voice-over narrator announces that "Tulse Luper arranged all these drawings in order for me one Monday afternoon when he heard that I was ill", making it clear from the very beginning of the film that yet again Greenaway is addressing issues of organizing and exhibiting information. At the beginning of the film, various drawings are described, before the camera shows us a particular drawing which, we are told, Tulse Luper believes the narrator would need first. Details of the drawing are shown, while the

narrator, who starts his journey on Tuesday morning at a quarter to two, describes it as a map. The voice-over narration takes the viewer through 92 drawings and maps as he tells stories about how he came to possess them and the places associated with them. Thus, there is a sense of progression in the narrative constructed around 92 drawings; however, we never see the main characters, such as Tulse Luper and the first-person narrator. Making sense of such a story requires reliable maps and a convincing method of organizing the documents. Unsurprisingly, unlike conventional documentaries, this is not the case in *A Walk Through H*; more often than not, the narrator's accounts of how he came to possess each of the maps are dubious and even absurd. In a number of cases, the narrator distrusts the usefulness and chronology of the maps, hence pointing to the unreliability and non-linearity of the fabricated narrative that is the journey through H. Therefore, it appears that even if the elements of the archive are reshuffled, a journey (a narrative) would still be possible, hence the arbitrariness of organizing methods. Interestingly, the secondary title of the film is *The Reincarnation of an Ornithologist*, in which the word "reincarnation" brings to mind the idea of repetition; it is as if, before the narrator, another person had organized the maps in order to make his own narrative (journey) possible. Indeed, it is mentioned in the film that one of the maps was bought by the narrator from a traveller who had taken the same journey before. The preoccupation with repetition in *A Walk Through H* resonates with the sense of reiteration in Michael Nyman's music in this film. Like other minimalist composers, such as Philip Glass and Steve Reich, Nyman, who wrote the music for Greenaway's films such as *A Walk Through H*, *Vertical Features Remake* and *The Falls*, employs repetitive structures. Just as Greenaway's characters and voice-over narrators exhaustively redo and retell, the structure of Nyman's music makes one wonder whether the same music is re-playing.

We learn that Tulse Luper has told the narrator that he needs 92 maps in his journey through H, and "the time to decide what H stood for was at the end of the journey". Moreover, the viewer is told by the anonymous narrator that by the end of the journey it barely mattered what H was. Writing about Greenaway's films made in the 1970s, Bart Testa argues that:

The Greenaway protagonist is, or joins, a narrator engaged in painstaking interpretations of this found material that has come into his possession. The story of how he interprets, how the material came to him, matter more than the story substance itself [...]. Indeed, the concern with internal interpretation so complicates, then impedes [...] the proceedings that narrative momentum expires, and only the structure of the film, a parametric machine of repetition and variation, stubbornly continues to the end (87).

For Greenaway, the beginning and end of the journey (narrative) serve the purpose of creating a space where the voice-over narrator provides information that constantly frustrates the viewer's expectations. After travelling 1418 miles, the traveller arrives at his destination on a Tuesday morning early at about a quarter to two, exactly the same time and day as he started his journey. Has he actually travelled, or has the journey started and ended at the same moment? Such coincidences together with the first-person narrator's peculiar descriptions of people and situations, though delivered with a serious tone, make his accounts sound unbelievable. Once more, the authority and truthfulness of voice-over narration is undermined by the improbability of the incidents described.

The identity of the first-person narrator is never revealed in *A Walk Through H*. The unidentified relationship between the anonymous narrator and the source of his information make the authority of knowledge in this film unstable. However, there are hints that he might

actually be Tulse Luper, a key figure in Greenaway's future films. A woman shown at the art gallery in the beginning of the film leaves the gallery at the end; then, we are shown the cover of a book she had been reading: *Migratory Birds of the Northern Hemisphere* by Tulse Luper, 92 Maps, 1418 Birds in Colour. Thus, perhaps after all the narrator is Tulse Luper himself and she has been hearing the voice of the book's author: Luper. If the viewer knows that the drawings in the gallery (maps in the film) are actually made by Greenaway himself and Luper is his alter-ego, then the author of the book is indeed the maker of *A Walk Through H*, who re-orders and exhibits his own private archive of drawings in this film. Therefore, the film poses questions regarding the authorship and organizing of the archival documents (drawings) and, certainly, the authorship of the film. In *A Walk Through H*, it is less important to know the narrator than to contemplate the failure of order in the film; the narrator's ordering of all the visual documents makes meaning unreachable.

1.1.7. *Vertical Features Remake* (1978)

Voice-over narration in *Vertical Features Remake* is deeply engaged with the notion of the archive. In this film, Greenaway is more interested in various ways in which certain archival material may be accessed, organized and interpreted. The voice-over narration starts with a reference to the incompleteness of an archive and the hope, naively, that one day it will be complete:

The Institute of Reclamation and Restoration are steadily examining and reappraising the papers of Tulse Luper. It is hoped eventually to make a complete and definitive reconstruction of his research. The papers we have

discovered so far run into hundreds of thousands and almost daily more papers are being added.

We are told that the research done by Tulse Luper was "a project of structure and organization," the result of which was presented in a short film shown by Tulse Luper to two other people before its complete disappearance. However, some of Luper's notes, drawings, photographs, and parts of the film "supposedly duped from the original negative" were found; these recently found materials are then used by various experts to remake the original, lost film. As the title of the film suggests, *Vertical Features Remake* is a remake of Luper's original film, *Vertical Features*: a film that is made of images of vertical objects such as tree trunks, electric poles, and sign posts. However, unlike other remakes, in *Vertical Features Remake*, *Vertical Features* is remade three times in the same film, each time based on different experts' interpretations of the recently found material, which are added to the archive of vertical objects and lists prepared by Luper. We are told, "the Institute of Reclamation and Restoration have decided to make Tulse Luper's film again"; therefore, it is supposedly an official institution with its own experts that is responsible for remaking the film, which involves reorganizing the found archival material.

As a satire of talking head documentaries in which experts of different types (e.g. scientists, scholars, and religious figures) provide their take on the material presented in the film, *Vertical Features Remake* plays with the idea of interpreting found material in different ways. In each of the remakes scholars and other authorities comment on the found material in order to justify their suggested way of reorganizing the vertical images and thus making a final, finished film. The very act of collecting and reorganizing archival material is itself building a new archive, and, in the case of remaking *Vertical Features*, a new film. Thus, presenting the three remakes in the same film is yet another way of archiving the material, which makes one wonder

in what other ways *Vertical Features* can be remade and reorganized. Following the film's logic, it is reasonable to suggest that after finding new material from Luper's research, it is possible to remake *Vertical Features* in other ways. The archive is always incomplete and the need to update it with new material proves that one cannot make a final "true" version of *Vertical Features*. Regarding the completion of the second remake, the narrator suggests, "whilst the Institute of Reclamation and Restoration acknowledge that there is no conclusively demonstrative evidence to suggest our organization of the material is above argument, we feel it was in the spirit of Tulse Luper's research."¹ Thus, no method of collection is the definite way of organizing the material; based on newly discovered information and objects, there exist other ways of classifying the documents and constructing a new narrative.

There are other ways in which voice-over narration in *Vertical Features Remake* makes the viewer think about the archive. For example, the notion of fabrication and fraud in making simulated archives is foregrounded in the film. After the completion of the second remake, The Institute of Reclamation and Restoration is accused of fraud; the narrator says that "the photographs that were supposed to be of Tulse Luper were in fact photographs of the film editor's father-in-law." Moreover, "the very existence of Tulse Luper" was doubted when it was suggested that "Tulse Luper was a figment of the Institute's imagination, invented so that the IRR could undertake a project which was no more than an academic film-editing exercise." Interestingly, the voice-over narration in this segment of *Vertical Features Remake* is self-reflexively describing what Greenaway himself is doing in this film, that is fabricating a whole set of characters, photographs, notes, and drawings in order to make the viewer reflect not only on the constructedness of any given archive, but also on the authorship of the film.

¹ If we agree that the goal of a film restoration project is to make the film look closer to "the original", the self-reflexive voice-over narration in this section of *Vertical Features Remake* overtly pokes fun at all the experts and institutions involved in this process: film scholars, archivists and museums.

1.2. *The Falls* (1980)

A number of recurring thematic preoccupations and formal techniques can be identified in Greenaway's films of the sixties and seventies. Elliott and Purdy write that these films "already bore the Greenaway signature: a fondness for landscape; a fascination with lists, grids, taxonomies, catalogues, counting games and aleatory sequences; [and,] a parodic use of the documentary voice-over" (6). According to Thomas Elsaesser, Greenaway's early works "took the cinema into the worlds of maps and archives, [...] missing persons and Babylonian libraries, stripping character and motive out of the narrative, and confronting film [...] with its mythically documentary origins" (180). Greenaway's first feature film, *The Falls*, contains a range of references to his earlier works. Whereas in his pre-*Falls* films references are often made to the constructedness of the film (e.g. remakes of *Vertical Features* in *Vertical Features Remake*), in *The Falls* Greenaway not only foregrounds the filmmaking process but also quotes from his earlier works. For example, Arris Fallacie (#8) "developed a stammar round the letter H" which is clearly a reference to *H is for House*. *The Falls* is considered by Bart Testa, among many other critics, as a point of transition from Greenaway's short films in the 1970s to his more mainstream feature films and TV documentaries of the 1980s, such as *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982) and *A TV Dante* (1990) (Testa 79). *The Falls* is an audio-visual parody of an encyclopedia which introduces the biography of 92 characters, all of whom have been affected by a mysterious incident, the Violent Unknown Event (VUE). Supposedly, over nineteen million people have been infected; however, the film represents only a random, small section of "the latest edition of the Standard Directory published every three years by the Committee investigating the Violent Unknown Event"; this part of the dictionary contains the biography of 92 people whose last name starts with the word FALL, e.g. Orchard Falla, and Cash Fallbaez.

The narrator suggests that the names, shown in alphabetical order, "represent a reasonable cross-section of the nineteen million other names" in the dictionary. Hence, there is a sense of arbitrariness in the very method in which the names have been selected for this film; as if one has randomly opened a dictionary and chosen some words. One may wonder where is the point of entry into an archive? Or, would the narrative be different if another point of entry is chosen? Placing words beside one another in an alphabetical order in a dictionary is a random act in and of itself. Like the 92 maps in *A Walk Through H* that were supposed to help the traveller in his adventure, each of the 92 short biographies in *The Falls* is an attempt to understand what the VUE is. However, the question remains unanswered after over three hours of investigation. Thus, it seems, the very reason (the occurrence of the VUE) for collecting and ordering all these details in a dictionary is itself unknown.

1.2.1. Parodic Use of the Documentary Form

Like Greenaway's earlier films, *The Falls* is an experimental film that mocks the documentary form and its truth claims. In this film, Greenaway plays with many conventions of the documentary: the "factual" tone of voice-over narration; single vs. multi-layered voice-over narration; frequent appearance of "experts" on the screen; and, presenting original "documentary" footage of streets, homes, and other places where certain events have happened. In its references to the documentary cinema's search for objective representation and truth-telling strategies, *The Falls* pokes fun at documentary traditions such as Direct Cinema and Cinéma Vérité. For example, Greenaway's appearance in the film interviewing a Bob Dylan-like character is a parody of *Don't Look Back* (D. A. Pennebaker, 1967) (Lawrence 22). In an interview, Greenaway elaborates on the reason why he objects to Cinéma Vérité's truth claims:

I was interested in the whole cinema vérité thing but again I found that just as phony because the documentarist became too egotistical. Somehow his subjectivity became not just out of the frame but inside the frame. That, again, I found unacceptable. (Lawrence 22)

Very often in *The Falls*, Greenaway presents "documentary" footage of people and locations that look like they were shot at the time and place where the film was actually made (1970s UK), not a post-apocalyptic situation. For example, in Biography #9 (Mashanter Fallack) Mashanter is shown walking with an interviewer in London. The handheld camera used in parts of this scene on the streets of London populated by people going about their everyday life adds to the feeling of authenticity of the footage and its documentary value. This may remind the viewer of the Cinéma Vérité film *Chronique d'un été* (Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch, 1960) in which the interviewees and the interviewers engage in discussions on the streets of Paris. Although in *The Falls* Greenaway is critical of Cinéma Vérité, it would be simplistic to describe the film as a simple parody of one particular documentary practice. This is an experimental film that constantly evokes various styles of documentary film, newsreel, British landscape film, and found-footage compilations. Greenaway suggests that the 92 biographies in *The Falls* are 92 different ways of making a film (The Early Films 2). In this section, I will elaborate on some of Greenaway's parodic references to conventions of the documentary form in *The Falls*.

The biographies of the victims of the VUE are presented by several narrators throughout the film. One of the common elements of the different voices of the narrators in *The Falls* is their matter-of-fact "objective" tone, which is a characteristic of Voice-of-God voice-over narrations often associated with newsreels and TV documentaries. Greenaway describes the voice of Colin Cantlie, the main narrator in *The Falls* and the narrator of most of his earlier films, as: "[Cantlie]

had an excellent voice, deep, authoritative, and he read well [...] he sounded more BBC than was possible" (Lawrence 22). In *The Falls*, the voices of the other narrators have similar qualities - emotionally detached from the images and events, only describing the visual track or giving some detailed information about the victims. In many cases in *The Falls* connections can be made between the narration and the footage. For instance, in Biography #61 (the victim Shey Fallenby) the narrator says: "Shey drove a green van in circles" when we see a green van moving in a circle. However, the narrator's authoritative factual tone and agreements between images and narration do not guarantee the reliability of the narrator's accounts in the eyes (and ears) of the viewers. It is important to note that the unbelievable stories and exaggerations insure that no one will believe that the VUE has actually happened. The effect of such inconsistencies in *The Falls* is a meta-commentary on documentary's claims of coherency. Nonetheless, it is crucial to examine the ways in which contradictions are constantly produced in the film. In order to renew the sense of disbelief in the biographies and in the occurrence of the VUE, Greenaway uses various methods that undermine the authority of the narrator and the believability of the narrative. One such strategy is the encyclopedic nature of much of the information given by the voice-over narrators, which demands an active audience to be able to make connections and understand the role of each piece of information in the larger logic of the narrative.

The fragmentary and often contradictory narrations in *The Falls* do not add up to a single conclusion. If the goal of the film is to investigate the VUE as a phenomenon and the post-VUE condition, then it can be said that most of the detailed information in the film is useless and arbitrary. For instance, in Biography #5 the narrator says that "Standard Fallaby has a DC3 single-berth caravanette with a glass-roof." In Biography #62, we are told: "Affinado Falleur, according to his wife, was paid five thousand pounds for changing his name and identity by deed

poll. The transaction took place in room twenty-two in The Crane Hotel, Guernsey." At first, such details may create a sense of confidence in the authority of the narrator and the vast knowledge of the Commission investigating the VUE. For the first few minutes of the film, the viewer may feel the information is driving the narrative forward (shedding new light on the VUE). However, the repetition of such trivial information and lack of clear links among the biographies throughout *The Falls* saturates the film with an excess of information that does not lead to a conclusion, and, quickly disappoint the viewers' expectations of narrative progression. Instead of solving the mystery, the voice-over narrators in *The Falls* (along with other agents, such as the interviewees) build a fictional world from fragments of information that frustrates any hope of a cause-and-effect narrative.

In talking-head documentaries, either experts (such as scholars, doctors, and politicians) or witnesses (those with first-hand experience of an event) face the camera to address the audience "directly". *The Falls* mocks the value of such opinions and reports in finding the truth about the fictional VUE and its victims. As a consequence of the VUE, various new languages have developed and many fields of knowledge have expanded; this in turn has produced a large number of experts such as translators, linguists, and ornithologists, many of whom appear throughout the film. For example, in Biography #30 (Coppice Fallbatteo), an expert is shown talking to the camera about Coppice's life and his use of language.² However, the expert is not the only person telling the audience about Coppice. Interestingly, Coppice's biography starts with the shot of a narrator speaking into a microphone in a studio. In this Biography, both the expert and the narrator appear twice while they read from a paper they are holding in their hands. There are many connections among what they say about Coppice, such as his interest in eggs (the

² It is shown later in the film that the expert in this section is Bwythan Fallbutus (#42) "the officially-appointed VUE Commission's linguistic expert". His biography starts with the same shot of him talking as an expert about Coppice (seen in biography #30), while the voice-over narrator starts telling the viewer about Bwythan.

symbol of the VUE for him). One may ask what the relation may be between the narrator and the expert, both of whom talk about Coppice and appear to be reading from the same paper? If by this point in the film the viewer is aware of the narrator's fabrications, then what kind of authority is given to the expert who seems to continue saying what the narrator had started? Moreover, later in the film the expert in this section is revealed to be himself a victim: Bwythan Fallbutus (#42) "the officially-appointed VUE Commission's linguistic expert". His biography starts with the same shot of him talking as an expert about Coppice (seen in Biography #30), while the voice-over narrator starts telling the viewer about Bwythan. Therefore, in *The Falls* the expert himself is a victim of the VUE giving his professional opinion as a linguist about another victim. There are multiple other such cases in *The Falls* which point to the frequent use of interviews with experts in conventional documentaries. For instance, in Biography #16 (Ipson & Pulat Fallari), an expert is shown sitting behind his desk, holding a pen and reading from a document. Towards the end of the film it is revealed that this "expert" is indeed Leasting Fallvo (#91), who is himself a victim of the VUE. We are told that Leasting "wrote plots, fictions, lyrics and narratives" and "if the VUE had not happened, then Leasting Fallvo could have invented it." Hence, Leasting's multiple appearances earlier in the film as an expert talking about other VUE victims may be part of a fiction he himself has written. Greenaway transforms his sources of information (such as voice-over narrators and experts) into characters that contribute to the creation of a diegetic world where he persistently parodies documentary conventions.

1.2.2. Doubt, Self-Reflexivity, and Temporal Tension

In *The Falls*, Greenaway stimulates doubt and disbelief; however, I argue that since the viewer is aware of the falsehood of the narrator's claims, the sense of doubt turns into a

metacritique of the documentary form. By making his characters and narrators contradict each other, Greenaway creates a world full of uncertainties. For instance, there is no agreement where the epicentre of the VUE is. While in Biography #14, the narrator says: "the Boulder Orchard [is] the generally recognised geographical epicentre of the Violent Unknown Event," in Biography #24 (Casternarm Fallast) we are told that Casternarm "sincerely believes that the epicentre of the Violent Unknown Event was the Goldhawk Road, Hammersmith, West London." The film does not take sides with any of the characters; instead, it allows all voices to make their statements which more often than not sound like some random anecdotes. The film is full of exhaustive details and theories that instead of answering the questions regarding the VUE add to the confusion, as a result of which the very system of ordering and archiving the information becomes the subject of doubt.

Another factor that undermines the validity of the information given by the narrators and characters in *The Falls* is that at various points throughout the course of the film there are two or more layers of speech heard simultaneously. For example, Biography #53 (Orian Fallcaster) starts with the narrator talking over a still photograph, followed by the image of the narrator reading from a paper in a recording studio. Suddenly another narrator starts talking. The two layers of narration that can be heard at the same time (though one of them can be heard more clearly) provide the audience with multiple sources of information that certainly cannot be processed together in their entirety. One may listen to parts of each narration or focus on only one of the layers of narration. The multi-layered narrations in *The Falls* bring up the question of whether there is one single authority who can be trusted with the final answer. Is it possible to determine who is giving the right information about the post-VUE world of the victims? One may ask: who gets to decide whether someone is a victim of the VUE and should be included in

the Directory? In other words, which individual or institution has the authority to choose what is worth collecting and classifying? By provoking such questions, *The Falls* makes a commentary on the complex nature of such issues in the documentary form. The simultaneous voice-over narrations in Biography #53 constitute competing sources of information which Greenaway employs to confuse the viewer in order to draw attention to the role of single-channel commentary as the convention in the documentary film.

The Falls represents the Directory as an "institution" with its own gate keepers (the Commission). This is made clear at the very beginning of the film by the voice-over narrator and the text that appears on the screen: "[...] The names are taken from the latest edition of the Standard Directory published every three years by the Committee investigating the Violent Unknown Event - the VUE for short." However, throughout the course of the film the authority of the institution and the validity of its collecting and organizing methods are challenged by both the characters and the narrators. There are numerous "errors" within the Directory and some of the biographies are simply deleted by the Commission because they cannot be trusted. For example, the Biography of David Fallcash (#47) cannot be presented because of a "Directory error." According to the narrator, Fallcash is a "Non-VUE victim entered into the directory due to false representation." Another example is a "Directory error" in the case of Joyan Fallicory (#66) whose biography is not included because "Fallicory is the name of a place, not a person." And in the case of Grastled Fallusson (#89), he "has invented so much fiction about himself that the Directory is unable to vouch for any version of his biography." There are other mistakes in the Directory, such as a typing error (#69), and "inclusion of fictional character" (#80). Such erroneous inclusions and uncertainties within the list (the latest edition of the "Standard

Directory"), point to the possibility of wrong exclusions from the archive: is there a FALL VUE victim whose name is not included in the Directory?

The notions of chaos, disorder and entropy within the archive are useful in the study of the "inclusivity" of the archive in *The Falls*. The voice-over narrator in the beginning of the film announces: "The names are presented in the alphabetical order in which they stand in the Directory and represent a reasonable cross-section of the nineteen million other names that are contained there." As mentioned earlier, there are all different types of mistakes within this "cross-section" of the Directory; some victims are wrongly included and perhaps some other victims are mistakenly excluded. Moreover, since only a cross-section of the Directory is randomly chosen and represented in the film, one would suspect that wrongful inclusions and exclusions are to be found throughout the whole Directory. Thus, the multiplication of errors may lead one to believe that everything can be included in such an unreliable archive. In other words, there may be a kind of randomness in the inclusion of names within the directory. Like the collection of unrelated words that begin with the letter H in *H Is For House*, although the collection of objects and people in *The Falls* appear to be included or excluded randomly, still the "Commission" has managed to bring them together in a single list. By foregrounding the notion of inclusivity of the list and the lack of a clear relation between its different elements, *The Falls* parodies the way documentaries assume an internally coherent world and use voice-over narration to connect disparate images and information.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, self-reflexivity and drawing attention to the filmmaking process is one of the key aspects of Greenaway's cinema. In an interview with Stephanie McBride, Greenaway argues:

I always take exception to the concept that you can achieve naturalism or realism in cinema - all you can aspire to is mimicry. I think cinema deserves more than sheer mimicry. [...] I sincerely believe that the great artefacts of cultural history have always had that self-reflexive quality, so that [...]

Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* is a painting about painting. (53)

In many cases throughout *The Falls*, we see film and slide projections, film negatives, voice-over narrators in a recording studio, and the characters making lists. Moreover, *The Falls* explicitly refers to the significance of the mode of delivery of speech. In Biography #6 (Tasida Fallaby), the narrator says:

Tasida has painstakingly learnt a mechanical Curdine so that she might talk to her brother. [...] Curdine, notorious for ambiguity, is certainly antipathetic to being spoken mechanically. Tasida therefore spoke it with some courage, if not rashness. Her halting delivery and blunt pronunciation contained layers of unconscious innuendo, and the ambiguous imagery had a hazardous relevance.

In this scene, Greenaway is self-reflexively pointing to the way in which voice-over narration in *The Falls* is delivered: a completely sober, "mechanical" narration that, no matter how absurd the text is, continues to maintain its "objective" tone.

In *The Falls*, the self-reflexive voice-over narration challenges the very possibility of ordering the vast amount of information in a sensible way; there are many suggestions that the whole history of the VUE is impossible and might be "fiction" indeed. Very often, the narrators suggest that the film we are watching might be a "hoax" or an "invention". For example, as a "novelist, historian and ornithological journalist," Ashile Fallko (#70) would have "invented" the VUE if it had not happened. Obsian Fallicutt (#68) "had a theory that the VUE was an expensive

elaborate hoax perpetrated by AJ Hitchcock to give some credibility to the unsettling and unsatisfactory ending of his film *The Birds*." And, Bewick Fallcaster (#48) is possibly "busy collecting music for an extensive and encyclopaedic work of biography." The voice-over narration repeatedly challenges the "naturalness" of the systems of organization (the Directory) and the authority of the institution (the Commission) responsible for such an ordering system. Because of the particular structure of the film (each biography starts with a title card and Nyman's repetitive music) the viewer's hope for a more efficient organizing method and a more coherent story is renewed over and over again, which itself can be considered a self-reflexive move (each biography suggests the possibility of making a new and perhaps more believable documentary on the VUE). Interestingly, the motif of circular movements which often is foregrounded by the voice-over narrator resonates with the repetitive structure of *The Falls*. As the film progresses, the repeated failures in making a more sensible film in each biography turn into an exhaustive experience for the audience. Gradually, the film's destiny starts to echo with that of some of its characters stuck in a repetitive circular movement.

Another source of doubt in *The Falls* is the uncertainty surrounding the veracity of the documents in the film. In conventional documentaries archival documents often serve the function of backing up the claims the film is making. However, in many cases in *The Falls* the source of the document itself is suspicious. It may not be clear who has written the text, recorded the sound we are hearing, or shot the footage: is it made by Greenaway (his private archive), or found in a public archive? Moreover, the time period when a particular document has been made may not be accurate; a document might have been intentionally simulated in a way to appear older than what it actually is or it might be presented by the voice-over narrator as evidence from the past. For example, in the case of Corntopia Fallas (#19), while the image of Corntopia being

interviewed is on the screen, the narrator says: "One factor that undoubtedly influenced the present selection of names to represent all the other Violent Unknown Event victims was a collection of interviews filmed some eighteen months before the VUE by Erhaus Bewler Falluper." Additionally, the accuracy of well-known historical documents is the subject of disagreement between various characters in the film. For instance, the iconic footage of Franz Reichelt jumping off the Eiffel Tower in 1912 appears several times in *The Falls*. In Biography #12 (Musicus Fallantly), while this historical footage is on the screen we are told by the voice-over narrator that:

Musicus called his work [a choral work celebrating 92 early flight pioneers] "Sky-Lists" and dedicated it to Van Riquardt, the French patriot and pioneer airman who threw himself from the Eiffel Tower in 1889. Cadence, Musicus's wife, said that the film was a reconstruction, not least because the moving picture-camera wasn't invented until 1895.

Furthermore, in an even more radical move in Biography #68 (Obsian Fallicutt) Greenaway represents the actual Eiffel Tower footage as a scene from a Hitchcock film. While in this scene Obsian is shown in a room projecting on the wall the footage of Franz Reichelt in his wearable parachute, the narrator says: "Becoming an accomplished bird identifier, there was one species in the Hitchcock film which Obsian had always failed to identify. It looked like a hybrid of rook and seagull." The narrator's claims are unbelievable to any viewer familiar with *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963) or the iconic Eiffel Tower footage. Furthermore, Greenaway questions the authorship and the date of some footage already presented in *The Falls*. For instance, the character in Biography #68 projects the footage of a dead bird already seen in Biography #1 (Fig. 1.2).

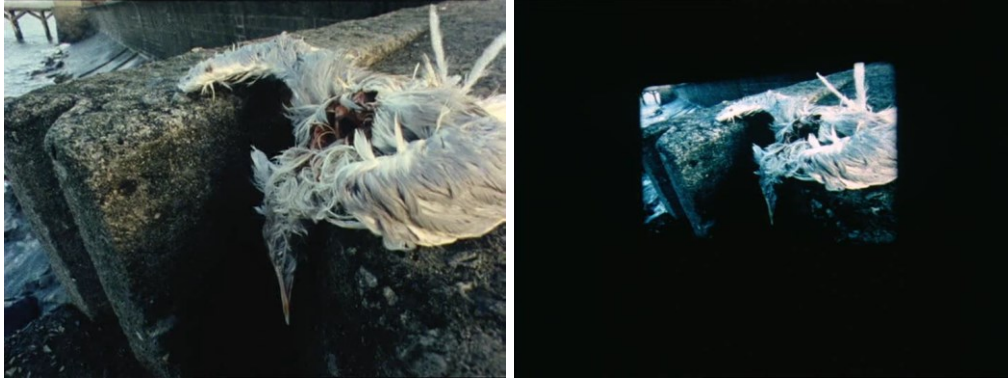


Fig. 1.2: Image of a dead bird in *The Falls* (Peter Greenaway, 1980): in Biography#1 (left) and projection of the same image in Biography #68 (right)

Such examples in *The Falls* do not necessarily generate a sense of "distrust" in the "true" author and maker of the documents since *The Falls* is clearly an experimental film parodying the documentary style. As a metacritique, they produce a temporal tension in the experience of watching the film and point to the often taken-for-granted reliability of the (hi)stories told in the documentary. Another example of temporal tension in *The Falls* is when in Biography #40 (Betheda Fallbutus) a shot of palm trees on the screen (in color) changes to the projection of the same shot in black and white. The change from color to black and white footage in this scene happens when the voice-over narrator is telling the viewer what happened to Betheda in the evening of the VUE. Hence, the projection of the black and white footage conveys a sense of revisiting the situation around the time of the VUE; in other words, the black and white "document" in this scene is supposed to be evidence for the narrator's claims. However, since we already know that the footage has been manipulated by Greenaway, the effect is not temporal disparity (producing the archive effect), but temporal tension that leads the viewer to question such fabrication in the production of "evidence" in the documentary. If we agree that archiving is an act of remembering and preserving, then accuracy in representing the "elements" of an archive must be one of the main concerns of an archivist. This is of great importance in telling the histories of the victims of the VUE (entries in the Directory), many of whom do not appear on

the screen; instead, they are "represented" by audio-visual documents, testimonies of witnesses, and by voice-over narrators. The failure of the Commission to maintain a flawless Directory and contain the chaos (made clear early in the film) is a commentary on the attempts to portray a coherent world in the documentary form.

* * *

Greenaway's archival films mock the documentary form and its truth claims by their use of humor, fantastic stories, and satirical interviews with "experts" and witnesses. The structure of these films is based on the presumed logic of a series of numbers or the alphabet, which, together with the continuous voice-over narration, create a sense of progression in the narrative. However, the errors and contradictions, often pointed out by voice-over narrators, undermine the films' own logic and, thus, frustrate the viewer's hope for narrative progression. Parodying the attempts in objective representation of history, these films foreground the subjectivity of the act of classifying and archiving documents, and emphasize the necessity of paying attention to what has been excluded from official historical records. Greenaway's archival films suggest that there are infinite possibilities in constructing a narrative in order to represent an event. These representations vary depending on what piece of information is taken from which archive, which authorities and institutions are involved, and what cinematic techniques are used to convince the viewer of the validity of arguments. However, it is finally up to the individual viewers with different backgrounds how they "experience" the film. Greenaway is an absurdist-archivist whose films indicate that archiving, accessing the archive, and the experience of the archive in a film are all subjective acts.

CHAPTER 2

SONIC EXCAVATIONS: VOICE-OVER IN THE FILMS OF CRAIG BALDWIN

From his earlier films such as *Stolen Movie* (1976) and *Wild Gunman* (1978) to his latest film *Mock Up on Mu* (2008), Craig Baldwin has shown an interest in the role of appropriation in the arts. *Stolen Movie* is made up of footage he "stole" from film theatres (filming the images off the screen) and *Wild Gunman* is composed of archival sounds and images. Baldwin's anti-corporate documentary on culture jamming, *Sonic Outlaws* (1995) contains several interviews with artists and activists working with appropriated material. In this sense, Baldwin's own filmmaking practice can be understood as a part of a marginal anti-mainstream culture. Baldwin writes: "As a new generation of 'media savages,' our cargo-cult can sift through the debris left by the corporate producers, to construct a playful and ingenious bricolage that re-invests the older material with new, critical meanings" (Baldwin, Canyon Cinema). Baldwin argues that he does not intend to edit already existing sounds and images together for the sake of formal experiments; instead, he is interested in using the "tools for telling" for the purpose of "taking positions, not telling stories, proposing ideas towards something other than a pure formal play" (Baldwin, AP Engine). In other words, Baldwin uses footage to "create an experimental way of writing history, experimental historiography" (Baldwin, AP Engine). As Baldwin himself has often mentioned in his interviews and writings, his films are ultimately meant to generate a type of active audience who, instead of fact-checking the films, engage with the material as traces of the past. Throughout the past four decades, he has developed a mode of "experimental historiography" through a hybrid of archival sources, live-action footage and cinematic techniques from across a range of genres.

Craig Baldwin's archival films exhibit traditional documentary methods (e.g. interviews) and avant-gardist uses of audio-visual material (e.g. using asynchronous sound in dubbing). In "The Status of Found Footage," Paul Arthur presents a brief history of found footage documentary film and discusses some of the main differences between it and other documentary modes, such as British government documentaries of the 1930s, *Cinéma Vérité*, and Direct Cinema. For example, according to Arthur, whereas the *Vérité* style is interested in creating a sense of temporal and spatial unity (e.g. through the use of handheld camera), the use of collage in found footage documentaries generates a feeling of discontinuity that can be used as an expressive tool. Comparing the functions of previously existing footage in documentary and avant-garde practices, Arthur writes that scholars of mainstream documentary, such as Bill Nichols, and avant-garde filmmakers, such as Craig Baldwin, Leslie Thornton, and Martin Arnold, "promote a style or body of work that contests received historical hierarchies while activating new ways of comprehending the process of social change" (1999, 63). Nonetheless, Arthur writes, there are main differences between the views of documentary scholars and avant-garde filmmakers in terms of the ways in which already existing footage should be manipulated in experimental documentary cinema. Scholars such as Nichols believe that:

Any subversion of the artifact must be balanced by respect for the integrity of the image, that the power or credibility of a given intervention is somehow dependent on exercising formal restraint in handling recycled footage. Too much distortion might render the object 'opaque.' (Arthur 1999, 63)

On the other hand, Arthur argues, for the avant-gardists recontextualization will inevitably challenge the integrity of original footage since it is indeed through the process of recontextualization that "the image tends to enhance not erase a fragment's historical specificity"

(1999, 63). Arthur suggests that filmmakers such as Baldwin blur the line between conventional documentary and avant-gardist experiments, since in their "post-indexical" found footage practices "the site of revision is keyed less by indexical referents than by dominant visual/aural codes and their material traces" (1999, 63).

Similar to Arthur's notion of post-indexicality, Michael Zryd asserts that not all non-fiction films "carry the promise of true and accurate representation of history" (47). Zryd writes that in conventional documentaries the image is used as historical evidence and the film emphasizes the immediacy and veracity of the footage. By immediacy Zryd means "the iconic power of resemblance to reality" and by veracity he means "the indexical power of the photographic image as an imprint of time" (47). But one may ask what we know about the image itself, about the off-screen space, about the moments before the camera started and after it stopped? In what story or historical narrative is the image used? Who took it and why? Where was it taken, when, and how? Therefore, one needs to know the contextual framing of the image, in order to examine its relation to historical narratives. Thus, as Zryd suggests, the meaning of film footage is provided by both the context and the content. For Zryd, one possible way to analyze the discourses behind the image is to use collage in order to recontextualize the already existing footage. And this is precisely what Baldwin has been doing in his archival films which bombard the audience with a collage of disparate pieces of sound and image, accompanied by frequent use of voice-over narration.

A critical formal element of Baldwin's films is his use of voice-over in order to drive the narrative forward. Whereas in *Tribulation 99* the always present voice of the narrator frames the archival images and sounds in the context of a conspiracy theory, in his more recent "compilation narrative" films (e.g. *Mock Up on Mu*), voice-over is used with both archival and

live-action footage to produce a sense of continuity in the film. This chapter will trace the evolution of the use of voice-over narration in Baldwin's archival cinema as a case study. The chapter is divided into four sections each of which explores a film: *Tribulation 99* (1991), *¡O No Coronado!* (1992), *Spectres of the Spectrum* (1999), and *Mock Up on Mu* (2008). With a focus on the multiplicity of sources and techniques of voice-over narration in these films, I will investigate how Baldwin's formal innovations informs the viewer's experience of the archival material in films that the filmmaker describes as: "radical gestures" aiming to arm the audience with their own critical agency (DVD commentary, *Spectres*).

2.1. Signalling Right, Turning Left: *Tribulation 99: Alien Anomalies Under America* (1991)

Organized into 99 sections, Baldwin's *Tribulation 99* begins with a whispered voice-over, which describes the invasion of aliens, who are planning to destroy the U.S. However, as the film progresses, this fictional narrative turns into a historical account of U.S. involvement in Central and Latin America. Baldwin's ironic voice-over in this film suggests that, in post-World War II, right-wing forces in the U.S. constructed a communist conspiracy in order to justify U.S. military operations and assassinations in Latin America. In *Tribulation 99*, Baldwin does not use a sincere tone in his voice-over to criticize U.S. foreign policy; instead, he adopts the ironic voice of a U.S. patriot, embodying the racist, right-wing, Christian fundamentalist apocalyptic ideology that, for Baldwin, informs U.S. foreign policy (Zryd 43). In doing so, the filmmaker exploits the potential of archival material (for example the hysterical anti-communist propaganda of the 1940s and 1950s) in order to comment on the contemporary imperialist ideology (Zryd 53). Zryd gives an example from the film to demonstrate the crucial role of Baldwin's voice-over in this process of ironic recontextualization. Baldwin uses parts of the pseudo documentary film

Chariots of the Gods (Harald Reinl, 1970) which shows the image of a U.S. astronaut over an ancient rock painting, suggesting that by placing the icon of U.S. technological advancements over non-Western archaeology, *Chariots of the Gods* constructs a binary opposition between Western and non-Western (advanced vs. barbaric). In this segment of *Tribulation 99*, the voice-over narrator tells us about the "bearded, light-skinned" space visitors (white European and Christian, Jesus-like characters), who are the real source of knowledge of the ancient non-white civilizations. Baldwin's voice-over in this case is an example of *Tribulation 99*'s critique of "U.S. presumption of cultural superiority," which "enables its intervention in Latin America" (Zryd 54). The idea of the inferiority of the aliens manifests itself in other ways in the film, the most notable of which is that they live *under* the Earth's surface.

Speaking about official justifications for U.S. interventions in Latin America, Baldwin explains: "Sometimes it was easier to believe the UFO stuff than it was to believe the CIA story that was used to justify our intervention in some country. So I lined them up, super imposed them in a way" (Sjöberg 21). However, in this process of "superimposition" in *Tribulation 99* Baldwin does not intend to offer a realistic account of historical events; instead, he uses allegory and irony to provide an analysis of "the historical discourses and political forces that motivate [such] events" (Zryd 42). In other words, while the film is rarely "realistic", it nonetheless references many historical discourses, and the discursive forces behind historical events. Baldwin blurs the line between fiction and reality from the very beginning of the film. The text in the very first frame of the film reads: "Warning: This film is not fiction. It is the shocking truth about the coming apocalypse and the events that have led up to it." After this text, the film's title is shown which is then followed by the words "Reported by Baldwin" (Fig. 2.1).

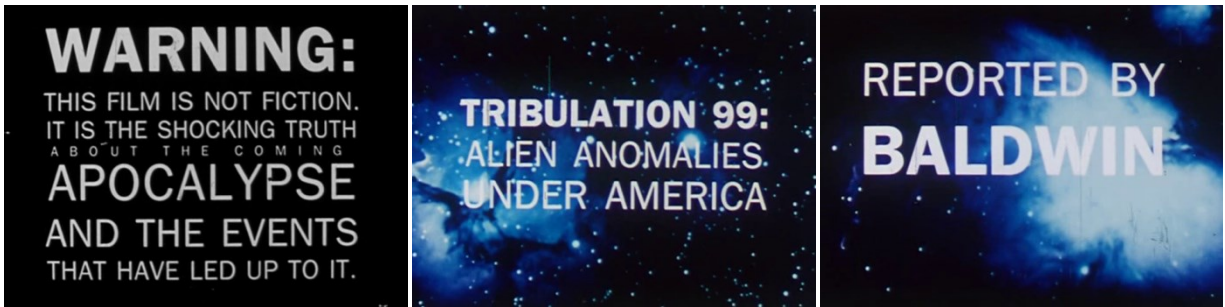


Fig. 2.1: The opening of *Tribulation 99* (Craig Baldwin, 1991)

Thus, one may assume that from the very first frames in *Tribulation 99* the possibility of a clear distinction between fiction and non-fiction (or fabrication and "reported" truth) is challenged. However, it does not take long before we realize that the film is a parody of paranoid pseudo-documentaries. On the parallels between the narrator's views and U.S. foreign policy, Baldwin says that the narrator is a "fearmonger who knows everything, he is the only voice you hear; it reflects the [...] sort of single-minded reactionary thing that dominates our foreign relations" (DVD commentary, *Tribulation 99*). By using only one male narrator in this manner, Baldwin parodies such a convention in the documentary form as well as the U.S. government's right wing warmongerist attitude towards "America's backyard".

A key feature of Baldwin's voice-over in *Tribulation 99* is his peculiar manner of telling the story; particularly, the whispered tone of the male voice imitating a paranoid narrator shapes the way the viewer experiences the archival material presented in the film. In "The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound," Rick Altman argues that sound in cinema cannot be appropriately described with musical terminology, such as pitch and timbre. Instead, he suggests, one should examine sound as an event constructed by various processes involved in the production and hearing of sound (including the tone of speech), which ultimately influence the audiences' perception of the film. A more recent work that goes beyond the study of cinematic sound as mere musical notes is Michel Chion's *The Voice in Cinema* in which he writes:

[s]ound film has codified the criteria of tone color, auditory space, and timbre to which a voice must conform; [...] these criteria are in fact full-fledged norms, rarely violated: dramatic norms of performance, technical norms of recording. [...] If a film violates only one of them, we sense something amiss with the narration. (50)

Thus, one must pay attention to the various qualities of sound and established cinematic norms that shape the audience's experience of sound as an event. The audience's experience of the archival material in *Tribulation 99* would have been different, if the tone of voice-over was closer to what one commonly hears in conventional documentaries. The whispered tone of the voice-over narrator in this film is an example which indicates that theoretical generalization about voice-over as the disembodied authoritative voice outside the diegetic space is an oversimplification of this cinematic technique. The narrator's whispering over a collage of disparate images in *Tribulation 99* (e.g. archival footage of street protest, aliens in a Sci-Fi film, and a T.V. commercial for a coffee company) makes it clear from the very beginning that the film is not a conventional documentary that aims to explicitly "expose" U.S. interventions in Latin America.

In order to explore the effect of voice-over narration in such a dense network of references, it is essential to examine the relationship between voice-over and other audio-visual elements in this film. In many cases throughout *Tribulation 99*, voice-over narration is accompanied by the text that is added, by Baldwin, over archival footage (on-screen text). Sarah Kozloff writes that "the adding of the narration track over the image track creates a pliable, double-layered structure, perfect for creating ironic disparities or contradictions" (110). In

Tribulation 99, Baldwin adds another layer (text) over archival footage, which creates a triple-layered structure (Fig. 2.2).

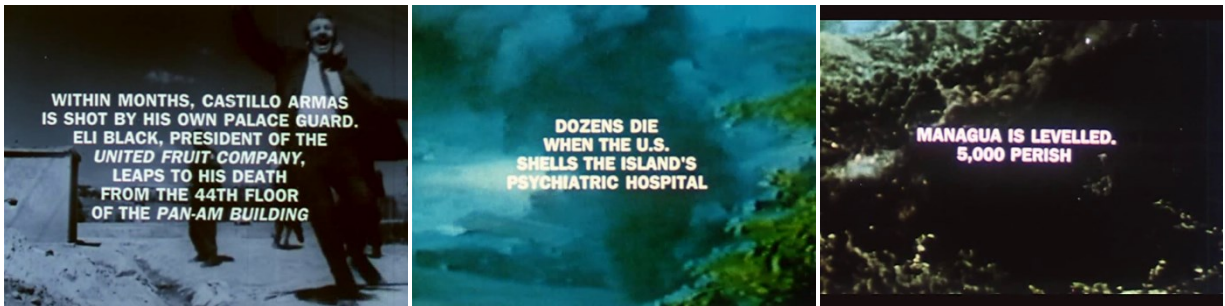


Fig. 2.2: Examples of simultaneous use of archival footage, voice-over narration and on-screen text in *Tribulation 99* (Craig Baldwin, 1991)

It is important to note that in this film the voice-over narrator may contradict the actual historical information provided by on-screen texts. For example, in section 66 of the film entitled "Great Balls of Fire Fall From the Sky," which depicts the 1983 U.S.-led invasion of Grenada, the archival footage shows the bombing of a building, and the on-screen text (added by Baldwin) reads "Dozens die when the U.S. shells the island's psychiatric hospital" (Fig. 2.2). As we see the bombing footage and read the text, the voice-over narration that had previously denounced the religious and ritualistic practices in Latin America as a threat to U.S. Christian population says: "The center of these sacrilegious practices, of course, has to be destroyed". In this case, while the text and archival footage provide historical facts, the voice-over narrator's claim contradicts what the viewers read and see on the screen. There are numerous other examples of such contradictions between the messages transmitted by the multiple sources of information in the film (voice-over, on-screen texts, maps, and archival footage). However, although there are many such contradictions in the film, often archival footage and text are used as tools to develop the narrative (conspiracy theory) laid out by the voice-over narrator. For instance in section 9, Baldwin's superimposed text on the archival footage of the making of a human clone in a lab reads: "They begin production of human duplicates - 'Dupes' - to further their ends above

ground." In this case, the footage as well as the text build on what the narrator had said a few seconds earlier: "[The aliens] vow the total destruction of the U.S." Such constant shifts between contradictions and agreements among the narrative agents in the film lead the viewer to examine the relationship between voice-over narration and the archival images (in other words, U.S. interventionist ideology and the machinery that produces it). In this sense, the film's meta-critique is primarily pointed at the ideological role of the media in justifying the U.S. imperialist project in Latin America.

2.2. A Live-Action Archival Conquest: *¡O No Coronado!* (1992)

Baldwin's next film, *¡O No Coronado!* features a combination of newly shot footage and already existing material. A critique of colonialism and the genocide of the Americas' Native population, the film tells the story of the 16th century march of European colonizers, particularly Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, through the American Southwest in search of the Seven Cities of Gold. In this film, Baldwin not only reconstructs the conquest through a collage of sounds and images, he also criticizes mainstream portrayals of the invasion, contemporary tourism, and the burial of nuclear waste in Native lands in New Mexico. Although the types of archival material used in this film are very similar to those in *Tribulation 99* (e.g. B-movies), there are major differences between the ways in which Baldwin appropriates the archival material and uses voice-over narration to create his fictional characters and tell the story.

In *Tribulation 99*, Baldwin uses fictional characters from archival footage to represent actual historical figures; for example, the image of a bearded man from a B-movie is shown, while the voice-over narrator talks about Fidel Castro. However, none of these characters participate in "telling" the story of the film, since it is only the voice-over narration that is

present throughout the film. On the other hand, in *¡O No Coronado!* Baldwin creates his fictional characters employing both archival footage and his own live-action actors (including Coronado, priests, and Native characters). Furthermore, unlike Baldwin's use of a single male narrator in *Tribulation 99*, in *¡O No Coronado!* the filmmaker moves away from a single narrator to multiple sources of voice-over, including the female voice-over narrator, and the voices of the live-action actors.³ The larger part of the film is narrated by a female voice-over narrator with a Spanish accent; moreover, the live-action actors' voice-over is used to tell parts of the story of the conquest. For example, what we assume to be Coronado's voice-over narration says: "The seventh day of July, in the year of our Lord 1540, after a full five months of hard marching my exhausted army finally arrives at Cibola." At the same time, footage of a man walking in the desert is followed by an animated map showing the path taken by Coronado's army. Whereas in *Tribulation 99* Baldwin undermines the authority of the male narrator through parody and exaggeration, in *¡O No Coronado!* he does so by multiplying the sources of voice-over narration most of which contradict the European male colonizer's (Coronado's) accounts.

Another main difference between the use of voice-over in *¡O No Coronado!* and *Tribulation 99* is the use of ironic voice-over narration in *Tribulation 99*, a strategy which Baldwin almost entirely abandons in *¡O No Coronado!*. The filmmaker calls his use of ironic voice-over in *Tribulation 99*, "Fake right, and go left" (Sargeant 2001). His ironic voice-over in *Tribulation 99* is a key device through which he makes his "pseudo-pseudo-documentary" (pretending to be a pseudo-documentary). In *¡O No Coronado!*, on the other hand, voice-over

³ Although these are the major sources of narration in the two films, there are instances of archival voice-over narrations in both films. In this thesis, the term "archival voice-over" is used when the film in discussion uses: (i) the actual voice-over narration of archival footage on the screen; or (ii) only voice-over narrations or dialogues (without the actual image) from archival sources. In *Tribulation 99* and *¡O No Coronado!*, Baldwin uses very short fragments (often a few words only) of archival voice-over narration.

narration is barely used for ironic purposes.⁴ In this film, voice-over narration and intertitles often drive the narrative forward, or provides actual historical facts.

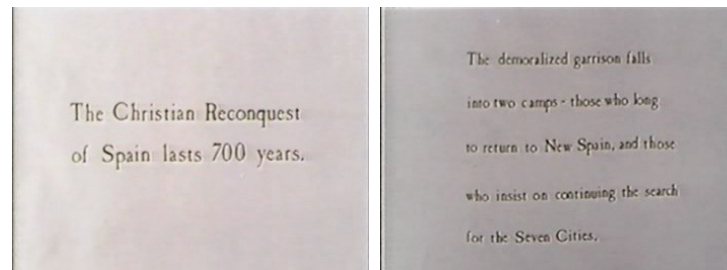


Fig. 2.3: Examples of the use of text in *¡O No Coronado!* (Craig Baldwin, 1992)

For example, three minutes into the film, the intertitle reads: "The Christian Reconquest of Spain lasts 700 years" (Fig. 2.3); this is followed by archival fictional footage of the Christian army while the female voice-over narrator says: "Seven centuries of continued war against Islam shapes a cruel warrior people, [...] and fosters a fanatical Catholic church." The narrator goes on to describe the last war ending the Islamic rule in Al-Andalus in 1492; her narration is then followed by male voice-over narration (identified as Christopher Columbus) over fictional footage of Columbus's departure. In this example, the voice-over narration is mainly at the service of reconstructing the story of the conquest. Nonetheless, the film is far from a simple collage documentary on the colonization of the American Southwest.

In *¡O No Coronado!* Baldwin employs various strategies to circumvent conventions of historical documentaries. For example, regarding the use of voice-over in the film, in some cases only voice-over narration is provided in Spanish without any translation into English. In another section of the film, two voice-over narrators can be heard simultaneously: one in English recorded for this film and the other in Spanish found in an archive. Such methods of voice-over narration would not be used in a conventional documentary, as they demand a more active

⁴ It must be noted that there are a few examples of ironic voice-over narration in *¡O No Coronado!*. For example, in the last minute of the film when the archival voice-over narration says "The accomplishments of the conquistadores were many. [...] Coronado explored the Southwest," the image on the screen is archival animation of some nuclear facilities.

viewer by denying easy access to the information provided. Baldwin argues: "I find [documentary as a genre] too limiting for me as an artist. I'd rather play with other modalities of human thought - psychic spaces that'll create a narrative to propel documentary content forward with energy, suspense, and fantasy" (Carley 23). In this film, Baldwin subverts other commonly used documentary techniques, such as interviews with experts. For instance, after the narrator tells the viewer about the tunnels dug by the Christian invaders back in the 16th century, Baldwin uses archival footage of an engineer explaining the function of the tunnels in a nuclear waste site (Fig. 2.4. left). In this case, the expert's "opinion" does not directly correspond to the voice-over narrator's story. Instead, Baldwin makes a parallel between the 16th century conquest and the construction of nuclear waste sites as a contemporary example of the conquest. Another example of such subversive uses of interviews in this parody of a "historical documentary" is when, in a self-reflexive move, the live-action characters in *¡O No Coronado!* are interviewed by Baldwin (Fig. 2.4. middle). They joke about the conquistadores and, in some cases, seem not to know who Coronado is. Similarly, the actors in their historical costumes walk in the background while Baldwin interviews members of the community about their knowledge of their colonial past (Fig. 2.4. right). While Baldwin's frame literally represents the colonial "past" in the background, the "settlers" are unaware of its existence.



Fig. 2.4: Interviews in *¡O No Coronado!* (Craig Baldwin, 1992): (left) with an engineer ; (middle) with the film's actor; (right) with a young girl from the area (the actor walks in the background)

Baldwin's parody of commonly used documentary techniques in *¡O No Coronado!* together with the film's multi-vocal and multi-layered voice-over narration (whose elements often contradict each other) help construct a critique of the historical documentary that enables the audience to draw parallels between historical and contemporary forms of colonialism.

2.3. Time is Reversible: *Spectres of the Spectrum* (1999)

Whereas *Tribulation 99* and *¡O No Coronado!* deal with U.S. imperialism and the legacy of colonization, Baldwin's *Spectres of the Spectrum* targets corporate hijacking of the media. In *Spectres of the Spectrum*, made seven years after *¡O No Coronado!*, Baldwin tells the story of a girl, Boo Boo, and her father, Yogi. With the help of Yogi, Boo Boo travels back in time to get a secret message from her scientist grandmother, Amy Hacker, in order to save the world from the threat of, among other things, corporate monopoly over broadcast media. According to the first intertitle, the film is set in "A.D. 2007, Eve of the Solar Eclipse, Las Vegas, Nevada." A mix of documentary and science fiction, Boo Boo's story is a framing strategy for rewriting the history of the privatization of media, from the early radio and satellite technologies to the corporate control of the Internet. Baldwin describes the film as fiction based on a true story:

It's the real history of media technology over the course of the 20th century but it was told through the lens of fiction, which allowed me to create this constructed world [...] in order to take advantage of what fiction offers, that's to say interior monologue [...], supernatural events. (DVD commentary, *Spectres*)

Similar to *¡O No Coronado!*, there are live-action fictional characters in *Spectres of the Spectrum*. Moreover, in this film Baldwin uses Kinescope footage (recordings of TV programs before the age of videotape) of 1950s educational shows (e.g. Science in Action) and other

archival footage to introduce historical figures such as the American inventor Philo Farnsworth. Furthermore, there are fragments of interviews with actual historical figures such as Subcomandante Marcos, the spokesman of the EZLN.⁵ Well-known media activists such as Jesse Drew and Erik Davis act as experts and members of The League of the Just (a cell of dissidents in the film). Through this group of characters and events, *Spectres of the Spectrum* blends elements of the documentary and the Sci-Fi to tell its story. Whereas the voice-over of the "experts" adds a documentary sense to the film, the audience's awareness of the artifice through the cheap Sci-Fi special effects generates a tension between factual and fictive events in the media history constructed in the film. Baldwin suggests that he wanted to create a more poetic and resonant gesture by mixing fact and fiction in a film that takes a position on history but it is not a "record" of history (DVD commentary, *Spectres*). It is in this sense that there are multiple agents giving information in different forms (not a single male know-it-all figure). The multi-voiced narration in this film is a combination of live-action characters' voices and archival voices whose sources are not all revealed in the film. Baldwin's choice of multiple voice-over narrators who narrate media histories - instead of "the history" - is yet another way in which he criticizes corporate monopoly and the hijacking of media technologies that is indeed the main subject of the film.

There is no one way to describe the relationship between voice-over narration and the visual track in *Spectres of the Spectrum* as Baldwin continuously alters the various qualities and sources of voices and images. In some cases, the collage of narration and images produces a comic effect. For example, often the internal monologues of live-action characters (while they are present in the frame) or the conversations between them continue to become narration over

⁵ Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation)

the archival footage that follows.⁶ Moreover, in some instances the accuracy of the claims made by the narrators may be contested by other agents. On the other hand, sometimes in the film the narrators tell actual historical facts that correspond to the visual track. For example, Jesse Drew says: "In the aftermath of NAFTA most U.S. electronic plants moved, where they could exploit cheap labour and dump their toxic waste".⁷ While we hear his words, Baldwin intercuts the image of him talking to the camera with archival material showing sweatshops and waste sites. Thus, Drew's talk becomes both an interview and a voice-over narration that explains, without irony, what the archival images on screen represent. Then again, there are several instances of a more subjective commentary by the live-action actors accompanied by related images. For example, seventeen minutes into the film, Boo Boo's narration is used over archival footage of a crowd walking:

Average human we've got now is a dim, forgetful, weak, superstitious creature, who, ruled by ignorance and fear, only knows to lash out reactively and gut impulse and greed, like the flock of mental cripples flailing against the trailer walls every night, utterly devoid of any creative impulse, any critical faculty, any ethical aptitude. Total psychic amnesia.

Baldwin constantly changes the relationship between voice-over and the visual track. In different parts of the film voice-over narrations of male and female narrators may be authoritative, informative or with a subjective point of view. In *Spectres of the Spectrum*, the relationship

⁶ In the scenes when Yogi and Boo Boo sit together and engage in a dialogue often we hear the dialogue while none of the characters are actually speaking (their lips do not move). One may call this technique "internal dialogue", rather than internal monologue. It is as if their voices and the image are from different times. Moreover, sometimes while they are shown facing each other engaged in an internal dialogue, Baldwin cuts to an archival image or sequence for a few seconds and then back to their image. It can be argued that in such cases, their dialogue becomes voice-over narration for the archival footage.

⁷ Drew goes on to say that "I am set up here in maquiladora industrial waste site amid eight acres of discarded computer parts and electronic components. I reclaim these parts and assemble electronic tools for our resistance." Interestingly, this process of collecting and reassembling is what Baldwin is doing in his archival films, however, with archival footage not computer parts!

between voice-over and the image is versatile, chiefly as a result of the multiplicity of the narrators yet also the diversity of the sources from which Baldwin draws the narration and the footage.

Throughout documentary film history "experts" such as historians, scholars and engineers have been represented as reliable commentators. The convincing power of their narration resides in their status as experts, whose knowledge is supposed to give them access to "the truth" in their field of enquiry. Although there are such experts in *Spectres of the Spectrum* (e.g. live-action actors who are the members of The League of The Just), one may question the reliability of their opinions that are often used as narration over archival footage. What complicates the status of these experts in *Spectres of the Spectrum* is that at first only their voice-over narration can be heard⁸; but, as the film progresses they are on-screen live-action characters playing the role of experts. Hence, unlike the experts in more conventional documentaries, their status as experts changes before and after they appear on the screen from unidentified commentators providing historical information to live-action actors in a fictional time-travel narrative. Therefore, after they appear on the screen (when their voice is attached to a body), the viewer may not expect an authentic account of the history of broadcast technologies from these fictional characters, and may even doubt what their voice-over had said earlier in the film.

Furthermore, the viewer's extra-textual knowledge of the actual identity of the members of The League of the Just (real-life counterculture figures Erik Davis and Jesse Drew) would change the way their voice-over narration is experienced. If the viewer is familiar with their work and their face or voice as activists and researchers in this field, then their claims automatically gain a sense of authenticity. On the other hand, viewers who do not have this prior

⁸ It must be noted that they briefly appear on the screen at the beginning of the film; however, they do not speak at this point. Therefore, the audience would not know their voices until later in the film when they talk to the camera.

knowledge of the actual identity of these characters may not simply accept the voice-over commentaries as true accounts of historical events. Therefore, in any discussion of the reliability of voice-over narration in this film, one must take into account the possibility of the viewer's familiarity with both the subject and the figures whose voice-over narrations provide the information.

Spectres of the Spectrum is an act of media archeology digging into the past of communication media in order to retell its history.⁹ Made in 1999, *Spectres of the Spectrum* is a futuristic apocalyptic time-travel film set in 2007 that features a wide range of materials from different historical periods in the 20th century (e.g. 1950s T.V., archival footage of Bill Gates, and contemporary live-action footage). Hence, the film's temporal diversity is not only pronounced in its narrative, but also in the very material used in the making of the film. Moreover, Baldwin complicates the notion of time through the asynchronization of the voices, which contributes to the feeling of temporal tension both between and within the various live-action and archival materials. Baldwin explains:

For low budget productions, we can shoot with cameras that run at non-synch speeds; this is a cheaper way to do it and then we add the sound later. There's a little synch in this movie having to do with the video sections of the interviewees, but for the most part it's voice-over. (DVD commentary, *Spectres*)

An example of such asynchronizations is when Boo Boo is in her time machine on her way to retrieve her grandmother's code. In this scene, Yogi appears on a small screen installed in Boo Boo's machine (right in front of her). As he starts talking, one immediately notices the asynchronization between his speech and his lip movements. Baldwin rewrites the history of

⁹ Indeed the term "media archeology" is used by Yogi in the film when he asserts: "we are going forward with our media archeology mission to retrieve, to report, to revolt."

broadcast media by using such asynchronizations in a collage of temporally diverse materials in a time-travel film narrated by multiple agents. *Spectres of the Spectrum* comments on the process by which the history of the media is written and in doing so attempts to reveal the various forces involved in the construction of this history.

2.4. Asynch History: *Mock Up on Mu* (2008)

Baldwin calls the form of *Spectres of the Spectrum* "compilation narrative" which may be understood as a collage filmmaking mode that offers some level of cause and effect fictional narrative through disparate audio-visual fragments. After making this film, Baldwin speculated that compilation narrative would be a form that he would employ in his future works (DVD commentary, *Spectres*), and this is precisely what he did with his next film *Mock Up on Mu*. In this film, Baldwin produces some newly shot live-action footage to frame the larger historical narrative of the history of Scientology and the militarization of space. The film is a fictional narrative in 13 parts based on the real lives of, among others, L. Ron Hubbard (Sci-Fi author and the founder of the Church of Scientology), the English occultist Aleister Crowley, Jack Parsons (rocket scientist, founder of the Jet Propulsion Lab, and a follower of the occult writings of Aleister Crowley), and Marjorie Cameron (mother of the New Age movement). At the end of the 21st century's second decade the Moon-colonizer Hubbard is planning to make an amusement park on the Moon (now called Mu) to lure the rich to Mu. He sends the brainwashed Agent C (Cameron) from Mu to the Earth to seduce Lockheed Martin (personification of the giant American aerospace and defense company)¹⁰ and Parsons (who, we are told, has gone underground after faking his death) into making a rocket launch site that would facilitate

¹⁰ At the end of the film, the text on the screen reads: "Lockheed martin is a pastiched character, but is still a very evil reality."

transport between Las Vegas and Mu. However, things do not go the way Hubbard had planned. Through her subterranean adventures, Agent C remembers that she had previously been married to Parsons. She reunites with Parsons and through their "free love" and "sex-magick" as well as Crowley's underground army of warlocks Hubbard's plan is thwarted. In telling this story, Baldwin writes an eccentric history of the lives of these real life characters, the military-industrial complex, and California's occult culture.

Just as the characters in *Mock Up on Mu* are hybrids of fictional characters and real historical figures, the film is a hybrid of fact and fiction in a mockery of documentary, Western, film noir, and Sci-Fi genres. Baldwin not only uses archival footage from such genres, he stages some scenes parodying generic conventions, such as noir lighting and Western settings. The film tells a fantastic story in the near-future through, for example, shots of deserts and abandoned towns with Morricone music, archival documentary and Sci-Fi space footage, and film noir car scenes. In an interview, Baldwin says:

If other people want to make biography, that's fine. [...] I'm not interested in reproducing a genre. I'm more interested in smashing genres. In the way that Vicki Bennett's work is called Genre Collage. Through mash-ups you see what a genre is. I'd rather do something more surprising than documentary.

(Baldwin, AP Engine)

About twenty seconds into the film, a voice-over narrator announces: "The broadcast you are about to hear is scientific fiction. Any similarity with persons living or dead is purely coincidental." This announcement is immediately followed by laughter, as if from the beginning of the film Baldwin wants to make it clear that there will be such "coincidences" in *Mock Up on Mu*. Indeed, throughout the film he reminds the viewer that in *Mock Up on Mu* there are

similarities between fiction and non-fiction and there is no clear boundary between true and untrue. Three minutes into the film the title of the film appears, followed by a text that reads: "Being a Not Untrue Saga, Told in 13 Chapters, of the Lives and Times of", which is then followed by the introduction of the film's main characters through photographs, texts, voice-over, and live-action and archival footage (including images of the historical figures and the actors playing them). However, this "not untrue" story is not necessarily a "true" one either since the portrayal of characters and events in the film is always semi-fact based. In the same way, Baldwin mocks the notion of truth and truth-making institutions in the documentary form. To do so, he employs some of the techniques conventionally used in documentaries, such as the use of narration over images explaining a scientific phenomenon. In part three of the film, we hear Hubbard's voice-over talking about the process of remembering while images of labs, brain simulations and scientific tests are on the screen. However, knowing that this is the fictional character's voice automatically destabilizes the authenticity of Hubbard's "scientific" explanation. Hence, Baldwin's "documentary technique," is not producing the same sense of reliability that one may expect from voice-over in a conventional documentary. In *Mock Up on Mu* a variety of audio-visual materials have been edited together, and the film subversively employs a large number of techniques often associated with film genres such as film noir and the Western.

One of the most surprising stylistic characteristics of *Mock Up on Mu* as a fiction film is perhaps the filmmaker's insistence on the use of asynchronized sound. The dubbed voices and lip movements barely match in the film. Sometimes asynchronization is used for a monologue: for example, Hubbard's asynchronized speech for a large audience at the beginning of the film (part one). Furthermore, almost always the conversations between two characters are asynchronized. For instance, in part three, the conversation between Agent C and Hubbard is asynchronized.

Additionally, the live-action footage of asynchronized dialogues between characters is frequently intercut with archival footage of characters speaking in other films whose voices may or not be heard. In some cases the dialogue between Baldwin's characters is audible while we see characters from archival footage; alternatively, in some scenes actual voices of the characters from the archival source interrupt or replace the voices of Baldwin's characters. The repeated use of asynchronized sound over short fragments of live-action footage and scenes from different archival films may seem like something that would make it impossible to tell a story, but, as will be explained, Baldwin manages to add a sense of continuity in this collage and develop the narrative.

In terms of the number of audio and visual fragments, *Mock Up on Mu* is extremely dense; nevertheless, Baldwin's use of voice-over narration and continuity editing techniques such as shot / reverse shot and eyeline match are at the service of narrative progression. A monologue or a dialogue is frequently used as narration over the collage of archival footage. For example, in part nine, a two-minute phone conversation between Hubbard and Martin is used over more than thirty shots of Google Maps, Orson Welles, Sci-Fi films, and Baldwin's live-action footage. Although the various shots from many different sources have been placed side by side, they hold together as a whole because of the continuous presence of the voice-over conversation. Such examples demonstrate the critical role of voice-over in Baldwin's "contrapuntal" use of sound in which continuous voice-over accompanies discontinuous images.

Baldwin's editing of a large number of shots from different sources produces a sense of continuity mainly as a result of the shots depicting similar "situations". As an example, Parsons and Cameron's car ride is represented by similar scenes with different actors appearing in a variety of movies from different genres (Fig. 2.5).



Fig. 2.5: A scene (car ride) constructed by similar "situations" from different films in *Mock Up on Mu* (Craig Baldwin, 2008)

In Baldwin's collage in *Mock Up on Mu* characters are interchangeable as long as they produce the same "gestures" through, for example, similar framing or setting in consecutive shots from different sources. In fact, all the key characters in the film have several avatars. For example, Cameron may be represented by Michelle Silva (the actress in Baldwin's live-action footage), the real life Marjorie Cameron in a scene from Kenneth Anger's *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954), Joan Crawford in *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954), and numerous other women from less familiar sources. Baldwin explains the reasons behind the formal decision to construct a scene by editing shots of different actors from disparate sources. He suggests that since he has moved from collage to narrative, this is the type of editing he prefers. However, he argues that "if you just do that, you're stuck in a purely visual thing, a graphic thing, a formal thing. I'm also very interested in documentary form and in these issues of history" (Sicinski 16). For Baldwin, the choice of editing together various shots from different time periods and genres in the same scene is not only a formal choice, but also enables him to bring together previously separate fragments of the past in order to point to the links between them. Similarly, the film's two major

themes (aerospace and the occult) are related together not only by voice-over narration and the story of the film, but also by juxtaposing audio-visual fragments associated with each of them (e.g. NASA footage and occult imagery). As Baldwin suggests, *Mock Up on Mu* "is a junk sculpture, where form and content are married" (APEngine). Writing about Guy Maddin's *My Winnipeg* (2007) Catherine Russell argues that the mix of home-movie and archival footage of Winnipeg and newly shot "dreamy scenes of memory and childhood" in this film "reconfigures the river-crossed city as a matrix of historical material" (2013, 108-109). Similarly, the complex arrangement of diverse materials in *Mock Up on Mu* reconstructs a history of the aerospace industry, militarism and occultism.

* * *

Baldwin's method of archival filmmaking resonates with the actions and motifs of some of his characters: Boo Boo digging the earth and travelling back in time to retrieve the hidden code and save the planet, and Agent C's success through her literally underground adventure are only a few such examples. Similarly, Baldwin's digging of the detritus is the act of an activist-archivist connecting the unconnectable. Catherine Russell posits that the intertextuality of found footage filmmaking is "an allegory of history, [and] a montage of memory traces" which enables the filmmaker to engage "with the past through recall, retrieval, and recycling" (1999, 238). The engagement with the past through the experience of the archive is complicated in Baldwin's films by the juxtaposition of a wide range of materials which have been put together using a multitude of avant-garde cinematic techniques. Intercutting fiction and documentary footage (e.g. educational films, war propaganda, interviews, and B-movies) with newly shot live-action

material is nothing uncommon in Baldwin's films. Likewise, the audio track is dense with archival and newly recorded sounds and voices. However, Baldwin's use of voice-over narration in this network of sounds and images functions as a guiding apparatus that in many different ways helps the audience make connections between each film's various narrative lines and the historical circumstances in which they have been produced (e.g. parallels between the 16th century colonialism and nuclear waste sites). Baldwin's use of voice-over narration demands an active viewer on-board for a time travel.

CONCLUSION

The archival films examined in this thesis utilize voice-over narration in diverse ways. A common characteristic of them is that through their use of this device they bring together a multitude of discontinuous audio-visual fragments to build story lines that run parallel to the image track, shaping narratives that are only partially developed. By paying attention to specific qualities of voice-over narration in Peter Greenaway's and Craig Baldwin's films, I intended to elaborate on some of the ways in which voice-over may shape the viewer's engagement with the visual material. For example, narration may be unreliable, contradictory, sarcastic, factual, multi-layered, multi-voiced, multi-lingual, male or female, adult or child, and so on. Moreover, both filmmakers' works are structured according to an archival logic; they are divided into chapters that are then put together to construct a narrative or a world with multiple stories. They exploit the fragmentary nature of archival documents and develop their aesthetic strategies accordingly.

Greenaway's early films chiefly interrogate the notion of the archive within a fictional universe that is first and foremost built by voice-over narration. His own drawings and written documents are often rendered historical by voice-over narration. On the other hand, over the past three decades, Baldwin's films have become ever more complex in their formal experimentation with voice-over narration, archival material, and newly-shot footage. In his more recent films, already existing sounds and images blend together with futuristic live-action material in order to build a semi-fact-based world where the filmmaker investigates a specific political issue (while hinting at a variety of other subjects). The two case studies in this thesis exhibit some non-conventional uses of voice-over narration, and both directors challenge the conventions of voice-over authority, engaging the viewer in a play of believability. Through their various formal

strategies, archival images are cast into a liminal zone between fact and fiction. Given the extensive use of voice over in archival film practices, there are many additional avenues of research that emerge from these two case studies.

In the course of my research, I discovered that there is a lack of scholarship on the "foundness" of found-sound voice-over in archival film practices. Just like the visual track, the viewer may or may not be able to recognize the source of a particular piece of archival sound. For example, perhaps most viewers are familiar with George W. Bush's Axis of Evil speech after the 9/11 attacks. If a fragment of this speech is used over archival footage from the Vietnam War, then the viewer will realize that the audio and visual tracks are indeed from two historical moments. If there is a perception of temporal disparity among found-sound voice-over and image, the relationship between the two and the effect of such a difference on the film as a whole must be investigated. On the other hand, if the source of an archival sound fragment used as voice-over narration is more obscure, there are several critical questions to be asked. What aesthetic qualities may lead the viewer to believe that the sound is indeed "found" (not recorded by the filmmaker)? For example, depending on the recording quality of a sound piece the viewer may be able to distinguish between different time periods. Finally, research must be done on the potential of fabricated archival sounds used as voice-over narration. Similar to images that are simulated to appear older than what they actually are (for example, intentionally damaged film strips that appear to have decayed in time), sound can be manipulated to give the viewer an impression of another time period. Further research must be done on the ways in which found-sound voice-over is perceived as such, and on the effect of such perception of the narration on the viewer's reading of the image.

While the idea of asynchronization has been explored in this thesis, the use of anachronistic voice-over narration in archival films may be of interest for future research in this field. By anachronistic voice-over narration I mean a type of narration that exhibits chronological inconsistency on at least one of these two levels: (i) the aesthetic qualities of sound in relation to the image (for example, the voice-over of a robot used for a narrator from the Middle Ages); (ii) the narrator expressing an idea or referring to an object that did not exist at the time (for instance, a 19th century narrator talking about Postmodernism). The use of anachronistic voice-over narration in archival film practices resonates with the process of information retrieval through which we construct and update our memories. We may believe to have a memory from our childhood, while in reality our childhood memory has been revised based on new information, photographs, films, dreams or other influences. Just as asynchronized narration changes the way we experience fragments of the past, anachronistic voice-over narration has a great potential in both archival filmmaking and scholarship.

Another direction for further research on this topic would be the examination of the role of voice-over narration in relation to the "past" of the footage and the "now" of the viewing moment. For example, Greenaway's own footage of the streets and phone booths in 1970s England can be read as archival a few decades later. While the recurring shots of red phone booths in *Dear Phone* looked very contemporary in the 1970s, there is a sense of pastness associated with them for the audience now. Further research can be done on the effect of voice-over narration on the perception of temporal difference by the audiences in different times - particularly if there is a large time gap between the release date and when the viewer watches the film. Moreover, the experience of temporal difference may be expanded by the use of Benshi style of voice-over narration (live narration) in archival film practices such as Rick Prelinger's

city landscape series of event-screenings in Detroit and San Francisco in which he narrates over compilations of found material and invites the audience to participate. Further theorization is needed on the potential of live narration in this field. There are many possibilities for the use of live narration over archival footage. For instance, live narrator(s) may provide subjective commentary, a monologue or dialogue over archival footage, and the audience may participate in the narration. Turning the projection of an archival film into such an "event", temporal difference is not experienced by the audience only on the level of the film's images and voices but also because of the presence of live narration.

Further research can be done on the links between the "compilation narrative" and the essay form. It must be noted that, just as there are many definitions of the New Documentary, there is no agreement on what qualifies as an essay film. For example, while Michael Moore's works are regarded as essay films by Paul Arthur (2003), Laura Rascaroli labels Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) as a "first-person journalistic reportage" (2008, 43). Nonetheless, scholars in this field, such as Rascaroli, Arthur and Corrigan, agree that although the essay form blurs the boundaries between fiction, non-fiction, avant-garde and art-film, it needs to be distinguished from each of them (Rascaroli 2008, 24; Corrigan 1995, 89; Arthur 2003, 62). Even though the multi-vocal narration in Baldwin's archival films aligns them with storytelling models, they share certain characteristics of the essay form, notably investigating specific topics in a hybrid of fiction, non-fiction and experimental film. As discussed in this thesis, through his use of the "compilation narrative" form, Baldwin writes an idiosyncratic history of a particular subject in each film. However, his emphasis on the original context of production of already existing material and the coexistence of several "side" (hi)stories in each of his films make his work radically different from the essay films of, for example, Harun Farocki. Further research is

required on the use of a multi-voiced narration track in the essay film. Finally, being fascinated by the "compilation narrative" form and the possibilities offered by voice-over narration in this mode, I predict that the number of such films will grow in the near future. This, in turn, will trigger further research on the relationship between already existing and newly recorded sounds as well as archival and live-action footage.

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